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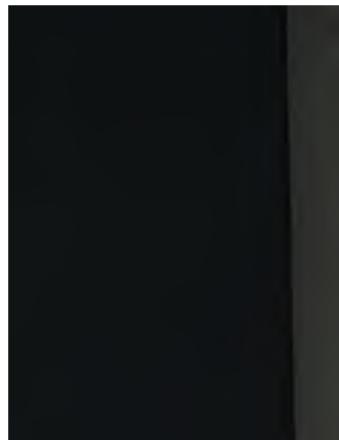
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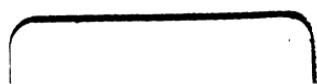
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8

Patterson



**HIS FATHER'S WIFE**



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# HIS FATHER'S WIFE

*Written by*  
**J. E. PATTERSON**

AUTHOR OF "FISHERS OF THE SEA," "TILLERS OF THE SOIL,"  
"MY VAGABONDAGE," ETC.

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MARY WARREN  
CLARA  
VITALELLI

FERRIS PRINTING COMPANY  
NEW YORK, N. Y., U. S. A.

TO

*JOHN GIDLEY WITHYCOMBE.*

*MY DEAR W.—*

*It is with extreme pleasure that I inscribe to you this island chronicle, wherein you will, I think, see — not in my work, but in the lives of these islanders — a certain likeness to that phase of art in which your sympathies lie so deep, and whereof you are so much more excellent a painter than I am a novelist.*

*J. E. P.*

*Billericay, Essex.  
September, 1913.*

MARY WOOD  
SL809  
VIAZELI

# HIS FATHER'S WIFE

## CHAPTER I

"Yes, it's a hard case, my lad,—an' a sad one, both for you an' the children—worse for you now, worse for them altogether," Aaron's father remarked, as the wind shrieked in from seaward, making the window-sashes rattle in their casements, and threatening to unroof the sheds and barns of the farmstead.

"Ay, that it is," said the son, gloomily. "I'm a man, and can bear what the Almighty sends—anyway I hope so. But they're kiddies and don't know what trouble is yet; and the worst will be in bringing them up—that's where they'll miss her most, though they won't know it till the harm's done."

"Well, as for that, it seems to me we shall get along pretty fairly, so long as Margaret stays on."

"M'm, yes, she'll be all right there, I dare say. I was forgetting her; but she won't be a mother, all the same."

"No, she can't be, of course, because she isn't their mother; but she'll be a mighty long way better than most women in her place." Aaron agreed to that. "An' if she shows signs of wantin' to go, we shall have to raise her wages, that's all."

"Yes; but I think she'll stick, now she's got help. She's fond of the little ones."

"P'r'aps we'd better give her another shilling a week at once. She'll have more responsibility an' work now," the father suggested.

"Just what I was going to say. But wait—I must see to things outside, or some damage will be done in this."

Aaron went out, taking with him the hired youth who lived in the house, and for some time he was busily attending to the needs of his stock and premises. On his return, his father asked rather wistfully:

"An' I suppose as long as Margaret stops an' does all right, you won't think o' putting little Barbara out to be brought up?"

"No, not I,—nor if she doesn't go all right either," was Aaron's warm reply, as he settled down again in the cozy parlor.

"I'm glad to hear it. I owed her father a turn I can never repay now, except through her, as you know. An' you'll never have a daughter o' your own now—'nless you——"

"No, I shall not marry again, father—not while Roger's young, anyway. No woman could take his mother's place with me."

"No,—but no good will come o' gloomin' about it, Aaron."

Thus the two men talked away the most of that wet autumn evening; while the grey North Sea, lashed by an easterly gale, sent its spray in minute particles

far over the flatlands and salt marshes of their island-home between the mouths of the Crouch and the Thames. They were discussing the great change that had come into their domestic arrangements by the sudden death of Aaron's wife, who had then been three days in the little God's acre by the black wind-mill, in what there was of clustered village under the name of Foulness.

Born in the house, Rugwood the elder had farmed its hundred and twenty freehold acres in the old way—"making a living and nothing much to spare"—till some four years before this, two years after Aaron's marriage. Then a stroke had so far disabled him that he made over the farmstead to Aaron, reserving to himself merely the right to a domicile and comfort in the house; such was his faith in his only son, and as his one daughter was happily married and gone to New Zealand, he had no further need to trouble about her. Truth to tell, his principal care in these days was Barbara, the dark-haired, blue-eyed child of a formerly young friend up Rochford-way, who had come to his help at the end of several unprofitable seasons; then, having lost his own money and his wife almost together, had committed suicide, leaving his child to Rugwood's care.

And so Aaron put aside his "glooming," slowly, for he was not one of much change, and still less of quick ones that came to stay. And Barbara and Roger grew and played and quarrelled, smoothed over their differences, went to the island-school, gave to each other

## HIS FATHER'S WIFE

of their childish largesse (for both were generous to a degree, which the boy's father and grandfather were pleased to note); they stood by one another in school-troubles, in summer roamed the meadows and the marshes and rode the barebacked farm-horses—she astride many and many a time, too much an innocent tom-boy to know shame at an unwonted length of rounded legs; in winter they sat by the fire-side, helping mutually in home-lessons, or in extra ones given by Aaron, or his father. And although she was younger by three years, it was always Barbara who led the way, who dominated without any sense of domineering. She was the girl of action and ready resource (perhaps that was the cause of her rather troublesome sleep-walking at times); he the boy of dreams, tall and lanky at his twelfth year, with a pair of fine, big, usually slow-moving dark eyes—the highly redeeming feature of a not too-good-looking face—that lit up with strange primeval fires whenever he was deeply stirred.

It was because of this half-unconscious leadership on her part that Barbara ever seemed, to both of them, to be a sort of protector to him, an elder and a superior. And Aaron noticed the circumstance, loving the girl none the less because of it, even while he regretted that his boy had not more of that masculine spirit of which he himself had now and then a little to spare; yet was glad to note at times that "he was a boy with a conscience," as Barbara also grew to recognize by-and-bye and to value accordingly.

Thus it was that Roger often became the subject of conversation between his father and grandfather. What he would grow up to be, they could not tell; but that something unknown was evidently not farming, and therein lay pain for the two men—especially for the elder, who was of a rather tender turn of mind. Aaron, being made of sterner stuff, though none the less kind where matter-of-fact service ran with kindness, saw what appeared to be Nature's intention, sighed, and turned his mind to the hard tasks of his workaday life.

In the meantime Aaron prospered, as much by hard work as by intelligence. Better educated than his father—who had given him two years at a Midland School of Practical Agriculture—and awakened to the possibilities of scientific farming, he was putting this new knowledge to work; the result being larger crops season by season, and finer cattle that fetched higher prices than those of his neighbors. So it was that in the hearts of the most there was jealousy, particularly when Aaron began to lay out his surplus money in adding to his freehold stake in the island; but he always bought land adjoining his own, and never made a bid that would deprive a leasehold-neighbor of an acre. Some of them shook their heads ominously to each other, saying that he was going ahead too fast, and hinting at the fate of a former Newlands—who was said to have acquired, in piecemeal fashion, half the island in a lifetime, then gone to ruin—and of Easten, who had come

there from Maldon-way, "buyin' all he could lay hands on, only to be caught be the tide on the sands-road an' never seen again." Ah, people could say what they liked, ran the final sum of the comments, but there was such a thing as "the spirit of the island," and it would see that no man on it became so mighty much more than his fellows—as it always had done.

Still—in summer, under the strong sun and moist sea breezes, and in winter, despite its salt gales, long rains and the general bitterness of untimbered land, no part of which was more than ten feet above the level of the North Sea—Aaron prospered, slowly, securely, heedless alike of tongues and traditions; while his friend Wallasea (a farmer, too, at the north end of the island, a man older than himself, and one whose intelligence was stunted only by his stubbornness and general conservatism) believed in him, backed him up—not that Aaron needed anything of the sort in a project where his heart was set—followed his methods limitedly and succeeded in accordance with his courage.

Then a second stroke took away Rugwood the elder, and Roger and Barbara grieved for the loss of a real and dear friend. This was when they were at the ages of fifteen and twelve; and Barbara, unconsciously because of that inherent feeling of being the elder of Roger, turned instinctively to Aaron—who had always been "Aaron" to her. In her earliest recollection his wife had called him so; all along he had been "Aaron" to his father and Margaret; no one had tried

to teach her the usual "Uncle" that occurs in such cases. Thus Barbara, developing rapidly toward older girlhood, had grown with the knowledge that Aaron and Roger were no relatives of hers—but just two very dear friends, the one a *boy*, the other big and strong and masterly, like a great, elder brother, yet whom she loved in part because she could, on most occasions, wheedle about him so pleasingly. And equally did Aaron lean more to her; whether it was that his son happened not to be of his own kind, or because in the death of his father Barbara had lost her only duty-bound protector, or owing partially to these circumstances and to the fact that she appeared to feel her loss to an uncommon extent for one of her years, there the matter stood. Perhaps, after all, the real root of it was that cross-sympathy of sex which generally draws father and daughters, mother and sons, together.

## CHAPTER II

STILL Aaron worked early and late, went cheerfully, merrily at times, to fields, markets, etc., and found prosperity, but was never aggressive when the subject of his unusual success happened to crop up between him and his neighbors. On the contrary—known as he was to be obstinate, decisive, and rather jealous of all that he claimed to belong to him—his reply was usually, "Go, thou, and do likewise," followed by a genial laugh; not that Aaron had any leaning toward profanity. Truth to tell, he was thought to be somewhat "religious in his way." Certainly no weather ever prevented him from attending church on Sunday-forenoons, and on fine mornings there was a decided underlayer of pride in his heart as he walked with Barbara and Roger to the church, always "best dresst on the island"; for, even in those days, it was his bent to "go one better" than his fellows, to be the man of note in their community, even though at the back of it all there was some reverence both for the day and the godhead. Truth to tell, in almost all things Aaron was a great "respecter of the decencies."

Then at Roger's importuning his father—declaring

lightly that it would be the death of some of them—bought him a small boat, to be used in pleasure on the Roach, the river that bounded the island on its western side, as the North Sea did on the eastern. Happily no present harm came of the indulgence, any further than a ducking in water and mud which Roger and young Dick Shelford got one summer's evening; the evil of it, in Aaron's eyes, occurred in the following year.

In this manner—the even tenor of their isolated life—another twelve months went by, and Barbara's tendency to be the leader in harmless mischief came near a fatal issue. She, Roger and Dick were wandering about the meadows, during their school-holidays—the boys bird-nesting, and Barbara, with true feminine inconsistency, daring them to nests in high and difficult places, then upbraiding them for being cruel. Presently they arrived at a small irregularly-shaped field in which Aaron's young bull was enclosed, and was then hidden from them by a bend in the hedge. Aaron had taken a great fondness to him, and named him Pride of the Marshes. Barbara began to climb the gate, it being too securely fastened for her to open.

"I'm not going in there," Roger declared promptly.

"Why, what for?" asked she, on the top of the gate.

"Why? For the bull, of course! You know he's there!"

"Well, what if he is? He wop't hurt you, goosey!"

"I know he will. And I'm not going," answered Roger, and turned away.

"No more am I," Dick announced, but stood his ground.

"Well, you are a pair of softies! Two big boys afraid to go where a girl goes!" And down she dropped into the meadow.

"There's father over the hedge there. He'll soon tell you what the bull's like, if he sees you," said Roger, pointing to where his father was explaining something to Wallasea about three hundred yards away.

Barbara's answer was to heap ridicule on them both, while she sauntered a few yards along the hedge, but with a surreptitious eye on the field generally. This was too much for Dick, who made valiantly at the gate, saying there was no girl in Foulness that dared to go where he dare not. In a moment he was at Barbara's side, feeling in his heart all the courage of the island and not a little elated at having out-braved Roger, between whom and himself there was always some boyish rivalry. The two wandered a little further, then stopped, pretending that they had found a thrush's nest with two cuckoo-eggs in it, but secretly keeping their attention toward the other end of the field.

A few minutes went by, during which the voices of the pretenders floated back to the gate, now in well-acted excitement that broke rather loudly on the hot air of the afternoon, then in sibilant tones which

Roger heard as a series of s's merely; and over the gate he climbed, leisurely, as if some alien matter was all the time thrusting itself from the background of his thought. It was not that their simulated discovery had worked upon him; such things, when known to be real, seldom drew Roger when his mind was already disposed for the other way. He went in part because he would not be left behind, mostly owing to Barbara having led the way and of Dick following her.

Thus they wandered along the side of the meadow, toward a partially-open byre, so intent on "discoveries" as to half-forget what had delayed them at the gate. Then, near the byre, a move was made to cross to the opposite hedge, which seemed to lend itself more to the harboring of nests than the one they were exploring. When half the ground was covered, the bull appeared around the bend in the hedge toward which they were going. Instantly they stopped, glancing from him to each other. In a moment they began to run, Roger in the original direction, Barbara and Dick along the way they had gone.

That simultaneous stampede was a fatal movement; it brought the bull tearing after the pair of runaways. On he came in all his youthful splendor—an impetuous, snorting, shaggy-fronted, cream-and-chestnut-pied lump of dangerous energy, that flashed along in the brilliant sunlight, with slightly lowered head, small, wicked eyes, and a dashing tail.

By a side-look Barbara saw him coming, and shrieked. Aaron and Wallasea heard the scream, took

in the situation at a glance and started for the rescue. Barbara's bee-line of flight was for the byre, with the bull on her left-rear, and Dick immediately on the right. If he caught one, he was practically sure of catching the other at the same time. Aaron—slow in temperamental change, but usually quick in passing action—broke straight through the hedge, where it had been mended recently, jerking out a freshly-pointed stake with him; while Wallasea followed, yelling and shouting at the top of his voice in order to distract the bull. Barbara disappeared into the byre and, with the same movement, slipped behind a three-quarter partition which she suddenly remembered on seeing. As she went headlong out of sight, the bull thundered in, shaking the wooden structure with the oblique impact of his side against the entrance. (Dick had gone along the end of the place, and was squeezing himself between the back of it and the hedge.)

Furious at finding himself in a narrow, darkish hole, the bull began to paw the ground, backing a little way, then rushing forward, battering the further side with his head till it seemed as if he would go through; and Dick thrust his way hurriedly into the next field and made off to a safer distance, his clothes torn and hands and face bleeding. Up came Aaron, seized the bull's tail and jabbed the point of the stake savagely at his right hind-quarter. For a few moments the animal stood quite still, as Aaron had expected he would. Then up came Wallasea, breathless, and in a way looking to see what he should do;

although no less experienced than Aaron was in such a matter, he had no pointed stake to use as a goad.

"Go behind, quick!" cried Aaron, with an indication of the stake. Wallasea made for the back of the byre. "When I get him out, slip inside to the girl!" added Aaron, and was answered with, "All right!"

Another jab, and, instead of trying to turn around, the bull sprang forward, allowing Aaron to get a look into the other stall, where he dimly saw Barbara lying on the dirty straw; she had fainted. Relieved at this—for he had feared that she was lying gored at the head of the bull—Aaron mustered all his strength, applied the goad again, with success. Ducking his head between his legs, and bending his body nearly double, while Aaron held his tail firmly around the edge of the partition, about he came, and was leaping out into the hot sunlight, when a vigorous prod on the other thigh made him turn left. But that turn was short; for the point of the stake was at him again on his right, and around he swung that way, to be instantly jerked back the other by a jab on the left—Aaron all the time keeping a vise-like grip near the end of his tail, while he snorted and foamed, then stood still.

"Go on," said Aaron, striking him gently with the flat of the stake. "Go on. I'll teach you your manners, my boy, for this—much as I love you. Go on." Another slap followed. "We always punish them we love. Get on." A third tap, and the bull moved forward, tossing his head, inclined to rebel, and possibly

wondering what on earth was the matter with things. But he was not going in quite the right direction for his master's purpose, so another, less assertive, prod brought him into it, with a quick look behind on that side and a movement as if he would come right around; for which reason he received a similar reminder on his left, pulled himself straight and continued onward toward that part of the field from which he had made the charge. When a sufficient distance had been covered, Aaron shouted:

"Now, get her out, and take her out by the gate!"

Wallasea appeared with Barbara in his arms; and Roger and Dick—neither of whom had gone out of sight of the proceedings—came running back, eager to be of service, in a way ashamed of themselves, and anxious to retrieve all they had lost since they followed Barbara over the gate.

When Aaron saw that all were safe in the other field, he steered the bull back to the byre, drove him in, left him, and went to the group around Barbara; who was then slightly recovering her senses. With a peculiar tenderness, that was missed by the two youths but not lost on Wallasea—as he called to mind long afterward—Aaron ministered to her barely conscious needs. The others had put her down in the sunlight; he at once picked her up, carried her to a sloping bank under the shade of a tree, told them to chafe her hands,—all they had done so far—and ran off to a neighboring brook. In a couple of minutes he was back, with his felt hat turned inside out and

half-filled with cool water. When she had quite come round, but was still pale and limp, Wallasea began to ask her questions, which Aaron stopped by a motion of his hand, and asked Barbara if she could walk.

"Yes. I'm not hurt," said she, and regained her feet, weakly. Aaron saw this, picked her up in his arms, without a word, and—big girl that she was for her age—carried her the half-mile to Rugwood House, as the farmstead was called, rather by custom than christening. Having handed his charge over to Margaret's trusted care, he returned to Roger and Dick, outside, and began his first series of questions as to how the affair came about, mopping his face as he talked. Wallasea had gathered the tale from them, as they followed Aaron home, and now and then answered for them, putting their account in a plainer way than they were doing under Aaron's stern manner. Finally the latter said to Roger:

"Why did you let her go over the gate, when you knew the bull wasn't safe?"

"Me let her?" gasped Roger, staggering by the bare idea of his controlling Barbara.

"Yes, you. You're the oldest." Roger stared up at his father's face, as if he was suddenly confronted by a vital fact that he ought previously to have known. "Why didn't you look after her?"

"I should like to see anyone looking after Barbara, if she didn't want 'em to," was all that Roger could frame, humbly, in his defence.

"Is that the way you look at it—at a serious thing

like this?—and your duty too," the father asked, with quiet significance.

"Why, she dared us to go into the bull's field after her!" Roger managed to exclaim.

"Oh, she did, did she? And you let a girl, younger than yourself, go where there's a dangerous bull, and you go after her, just because she dares you to? . . . You go indoors and put your worst clothes on, then go to Sam Rushen in the big turnip-field; and you'll work with him, same hours, till next Saturday."

This was a Monday. And Roger went as he was bidden, with his big eyes full of sadness, a sense of injustice welling up in his heart, but with no actual thought of rebellion in his head—not, in the last case, entirely because his father was one against whom he and his kind could no more rebel than soft-headed darts could break through armor, but because it was his nature to do as he did. Easy as he was to work into forgiveness, complaint had no part in his nature, except under phenomenal stress.

Turning to young Shelford Aaron said, at the outset more sternly, yet without the quiet, biting, pitying authority that had been used toward Roger: "As for you, Dick, go your way off my land, and never let me see you on it again till you've learnt the wisdom of common sense." Dick swung on his heel and moved away. "You ought to have some of it now, judging by your years (he was seven or eight months older than Roger); but it seems to me you'll have hair on your face before you know what common

sense is properly; so you'll, p'r'aps, be a man before I see you this way again."

During the conclusion of Aaron's remarks Dick had gradually increased his speed; at the ironical "p'r'aps" he was by the gate, from which point he disappeared rapidly, chuckling to himself at "that old josser, Mr. Rugwood—like a parson, he is, when he gets it on. Like him to see *me* doin' a week in a turnip-field, 'cause of Barbara playin' the fool."

Not a word was said by Aaron to Barbara about the bull affair. It happened, an hour or so after tea-time, that he drove off to Wakering—the nearest village on the mainland, some nine to ten miles away, seven of which were along the hard, clear sands, where an indifferently pole-marked "road" served the islanders when the tide was low enough to allow them to pass; i. e., during about seven hours out of each twelve. This "road" was their only connection with the mainland by foot or vehicle, and was cut in places by what were navigable creeks for barges at high water.

When Aaron returned, Roger and Barbara had gone to bed; and he sat out, under the verandah, smoking his last pipe in the hot night, while the smell of standard-roses, crimson-ramblers, stocks, lupins, old English cloves, honeysuckle, phlox, and great, scented peonies filled the sultry air around him. Aaron was thinking of the incident of the bull and Barbara, not a scrap of his business-visit to Wakering. As to the animal, on the morrow, first thing, he would sling a

pole across *his* neck; but her——. For some time past Aaron had noted her daring, wayward tendency; yet it was always—so it seemed to him—accompanied by such a girlish winsomeness, that he had never been able to raise a word on its suppression. Now, however, it appeared that he must; but he would wait a day or two, and see what effect the affair had on her—that would be better than causing pain by speaking without need.

So he shuffled the matter aside, and began to dwell more on what it would have meant to him and his domestic peace had Barbara been killed, or disfigured and maimed for life. Full of quiet pride as to his general success on the island of his birth, Aaron was none the less proud and jealous of his home-affairs and kindred matters. Unknown to himself as such, domestic happiness, complete and sufficient in all essentials, had been one of his lesser gods during some time past; he knew that he valued it, but was not aware of how it was growing in bulk and importance.

He had three of the best men on the island, he reflected; Margaret was a treasure in her way, and the girl who helped her was big, strong, healthy, willing and honest; he got on well with them all; his house was a good one—the largest farmstead on Foulness—with an appearance of comfort and prosperity, and its old garden was a delight, with that worn sundial at the farther end of the grass plot there; Roger might have been worse, a lot worse, even though he was a disappointment. (Here there was an under-

touch of sorrow and hurt pride, which would have been deeper but that some years of usage had rather dulled the pain.) And Barbara—he would not examine too closely there. Great passions bear few words in some men. He had a staunch bosom-friend in Wallasea—stubborn though the latter was in his ways—and several genial acquaintances; he was respected in the island, looked up to by the most of his neighbors, and what was needed more in that way? In worldly prosperity he was waxing year by year, and went thankfully to God for it all.

"I've got thirty-five head of cattle and eighty head of sheep; ay, and £500 in the bank; and come this day five years, please God, I'll double 'em all," he said to himself, half-aloud. Yet he was only thirty-six—he had much for which to be grateful. But he must keep a closer watch and ward on certain tendencies, were his thoughts; or there would be trouble and a good deal of pain. The meaning of which was, down would come that beautiful domestic edifice whereon he was learning to set greater and greater store. And still his mind would hark back to that other subject, till presently he quoted, as if half unconscious that he spoke aloud, although in a low tone, "And my rod shall bud and blossom among the rods of Foulness, while the others—" He had been thinking of the first half of the seventeenth chapter of *Numbers*; but the generous side of his nature forbade him to say, even to himself, that his rod should bloom, while the others on the island died away. Nor did

it occur to him that he might be stripped of his mantle, as it were, for his son to stand up in his place. And so he bolted the doors, fastened the windows, took his usual last look around, and went to bed.

On the following evening Barbara, while sitting on his knee, quiet and certainly changed for the time being, found little difficulty in begging Roger off the field-work, as from the next morning—just as she had wheedled Aaron into many a previous forgiveness, or obtained his consent to something that she or Roger wished to bring about. At the same time Aaron was pleased to recognize that his “boy with a conscience” had told the simple truth of the affair, shirking nothing that made against his lack of proper conduct at the gate, nor trusting anything in the least to his own benefit. And this, thought Aaron, should surely be counted to him for righteousness—i. e., curtailment of the field-work.

## CHAPTER III

AARON found no need to "lecture" Barbara on her occasional waywardness and general inclination to be a tomboy. The only further trouble, consequent to the "adventure," was a temporary recurrence to her former habit of sleep-walking, which gave Margaret much uneasiness and caused her affectionately to scold Barbara, and these two things had a good effect.

All along Aaron had thought—hoped, in his desire to say nothing painful to her on the subject—that these tendencies of Barbara's would wear away. Now he prided himself secretly on his "insight." It was a good thing that he had held his peace, he reflected, instead of being too tongue-ready, and making the girl miserable. For the incident with the bull had brought a decided change into her manner, had seemed to put two or three years on to her age; not that she had become unduly quiet or dreamy, like Roger was too often—only a little sobered down, as Aaron put it to himself.

At the same time there was, to him, a still more pleasing feature in the matter: Barbara learnt from Roger and Dick how Aaron had rescued her (with some generous, temperamental exaggeration in Dick's part of the recital, and a certain warmth of imagina-

tion on her own side), and her return for this was a greater deference toward him on all occasions, together with an unmistakable clinging in her attitude sometimes. She was still inclined to be a romp now and then—which in nowise displeased Aaron, who believed in young persons remaining young, but with a modicum of common sense—and was always the dominating factor where she and Roger were jointly concerned. For, despite his inherent dreaminess and her youthful activity, there was much in common between them—much that was now latent in the background of their natures, such as general kindness, ideas of honor, honesty, and the like, which came to the front only when this similarity prompted her to uphold him against the common boyish cruelty and prevarication of young Shelford, Fred Wallasea, Bob Churchend and others of their companions.

Thus the summer slipped by, dry and hot except for cool and refreshing breezes from the North Sea. Harvest was got in; autumn deepened; Aaron cast up his year's accounts—usually from the sale of one set of crops to the selling of the next—was delighted at the figures on the credit side of his ledger, then began to ask himself what was to be done with Roger. This question had troubled him much of late. Now the boy was “going in his sixteenth year”—high time for him to make up his mind what he was to be in life. He must be something, but that something did certainly not appear to be farming, much as his father had hoped for the contrary, ever

tending to the soil of possibility with the fertilizer of encouragement. He was sharp enough in his way, Aaron reflected, with a touch of pride that his son was in nowise mentally deficient; yet—. There was the troublesome query again: What was he to be? In a sense Aaron had often put the question to Roger, without any satisfactory result. Now, however, the matter must be settled, once for all. So, one evening toward the end of November, when Roger and Barbara were about to go upstairs together, according to habit, his father told him to sit down a while.

"I want to talk to you about yourself a bit, Roger," said Aaron, with his usual amount of hearty kindness slightly modified by the serious nature of the subject. Roger looked up at him, more questioningly than sharply. "You know, my lad, it's time you began to settle what you're going to do in life. You don't take to the soil—that's as plain as can be. So, as I say, it's time to fix on something." Under the steady gaze of his father's eyes, Roger's glance had again slanted to the floor. "Have you thought of anything definite?"

After a pause Roger answered, in no sure manner, "Yes, I think so."

"You think so?"

"Yes, father."

"But how can you be certain if you only *think* so? I said *definite*."

"Well, I know what I'd like to be most," replied Roger, with a little more assurance.

"That's better. And what is it?"

"A sailor."

"Oh?" Momentarily surprised as he was Aaron showed no more of it than the questioning tone in his monosyllable. "You are sure of it?" he asked presently.

"Yes," Roger said, but with so little certainty that his father remarked:

"Well, I'm not sure you are. But, then, you never did jump at things; you've always been a bit slow about your likes and dislikes—same as myself, p'r'aps, in that way. But you've thought it out, to yourself, I s'pose?"

"Yes, father, I have."

"It won't be an easy life, you know, like farming is when things are decent,—as they are with me."

The last five words were added on as a reminder of the comfort of home conditions, and a caution not to be too rash in hurrying away. But Roger heard them merely; they carried no particular meaning into his mind. Hence, with his thoughts really out at sea, as the expression in his eyes said clearly enough, he rejoined meditatively:

"No,—I expect it's pretty rough—sometimes."

"Ay, and pretty often, I'll bet. Anyhow, if that's it, that settles it; we'll see about it. Keep it in mind a few days."

So good-nights were said, and Roger went upstairs,

leaving his father to a line of cogitation that was not pleasant. At the back of his oft-recurring thoughts on this subject Aaron had hoped that his son would finally elect to stay on the land—on *his* land, and carry things on after him, as he had carried them on after his father, and had now been done during three generations. But it was not to be as he wished; it was a blow at his domestic unity, pride and peace; yet not one to try to turn his son from a real inclination, he smothered down his disappointment, and sought to make the best of what he considered to be a bad bargain.

The "few days"—really a fortnight—went by; Aaron broached the subject again, found that Roger was in the same mind as before, then set about such matters as he thought were necessary. He made a journey to London, interviewed certain ship-owners, the result being that Roger was placed under the special tuition of the island-schoolmaster (Rushley, who was his father's friend), for a better grounding in elementary mathematics and such "book-larnin'" as would help to fit him for his chosen occupation. Word went around that "young Rugwood was going to sea," and a few of his father's neighbors took the occasion of chance meetings to assure him that he would regret his choice, that there was nothing like dry land to have under one's feet, that there was no back-door to run out of there, etc.; while their sons envied him his going to see the world. As Aaron surmised, though not quite correctly, "that

boat on the Roach had done the thing"; it was only a half-truth, for the call of the sea had got into Roger's blood—the oft-imagined things, peoples, places and happenings beyond that seemingly endless stretch of eastern waters, whereon he had daily seen vessels coming and going since his earliest recollection; the pull of the unknown; the glamour of vague adventures; the wanderlust of youth—whether it be dreamy or actionary—had all combined to draw Roger away from home.

Thus the winter passed away. A couple of trips were made to London by Aaron and Roger for the purpose of outfit, etc. Then the good-byes were said—a little tearfully by Barbara and sadly enough at heart by the youth—and his father accompanied him for the last time on that errand. Aaron stood on the lockpit-side, watching the ship—a southern-going vessel of white sails and beautiful symmetry—out of the dock and down the river. When he turned away there were more sighs in his heart than he would have allowed his lips to utter for all Foulness Island. It was a severance of more than two bodies, of father and son—much more than a physical fact to Aaron. Since the time when he and his father had half-recognized that Roger was not for the land, he had grown accustomed to that idea; but here was the realization of that disappointment in so tangible a form that he went home grieving deeply.

Besides, at that time he was not "the successful man of the island." By hard work and intelligence

his original holding had been nearly doubled, and who was to carry it on after him? Who was to make it more, or keep it as he would leave it? Thus, both in this matter and in his home-affairs, the break was too severe not to cast a cloud on him for some time afterward, during which he and Barbara were drawn still closer together; and as she grew more attractive in certain ways yet kept her girlhood all about her, the habit was acquired of her reading to him in the dark hours of leisurely evenings, many a time when wild sea-winds were raging around the farmstead—without a thought on his part then that she, too, would probably leave him some day.

## CHAPTER IV

THEN Roger came home again, eighteen months later, in dress a note of exclamation on the island, because of his "brass-bound" uniform and badge-bearing cap with its shiny peak. He had sprung up three or four inches, had filled out to some extent, but had what seemed to be a permanent roundness of the shoulders. Otherwise there was no change in him, and both his father and Barbara found a little disappointment in this fact, as she—now at the age of fifteen, but appearing to be older—did additionally and superficially in that lack of squareness about the top of his back. Under the impression that the sea made all men and boys alert, they had both expected to find him "wakened up."

Did he like the sea? was the common question of everyone; his answer being a rather amused yes, made with an air of surprise at the query. His father put the matter to him at once, received the same reply, and pushed the subject no further. To Aaron—not quite satisfied, although he reflected that he had rarely seen his son show enthusiasm in a thing—the die was cast, and the best course was to let it severely alone. After three days he noticed particularly that Roger had "no tales to tell"—no accounts to give of storm

and stress, of shipmates, of jollity and life at sea generally. All that the youth had to say was about what he had seen in Indian and South African ports; and in the mind of Aaron—who was by no means a keen observer in some things, but rather a man who saw well into what he did see—this was evidence that his son had only “thought” he would like to be a sailor. To this conclusion Aaron was led largely by that lack of emphasis in his son’s character, out of which he had always argued secretly a proof of instability in likes and dislikes, and in this case he was right. But—not quite so unlike his father as the latter thought him to be—Roger was not one to turn back, nor even to admit his mistake at this early stage of the matter.

Then came the evening of merry-making, a sort of welcome-home to the wanderer, when all his former companions and older friends were invited to games and supper; and Roger brought forth his curios, giving here and there, quite naturally without a touch of condescension or favor, till each one had received something at which to wonder. To his father a hollowed-out, brass-capped elephant’s foot for a tobacco jar; to the elder Wallasea and Nazewick each a pound of “cake” tobacco, half-smuggled in by a tip to the Customs’ rummager; to Barbara the Indian silk shawl (because she had asked for it) that he had intended for Fanny Nazewick, and to Fanny the silk-worked cashmere one that was to have been Barbara’s, and similar ones to Betty Churchend and Elsie Newlands;

to Dick Shelford, Fred Wallasea and Bob Churchend (who were about his own age and just beginning to smoke) a South American calabash pipe each; to Margaret a parrot, "to talk to her and keep her from being lonely in the evenings when Sarah (the servant-girl) was out sweetheating"; to the schoolmaster and his wife (the mistress, with no children of her own) fifty cigars, and a pretty-faced, iron-grey marmoset in a blue flannel frock, a piece of Roger's clumsy work to keep the monkey warm, and now made boys, girls and their elders "nearly larf their heads off," as Naze-wick said. Then here a piece of branched coral, there a big concha shell, to someone else a lacquered glove-box, or a set of Chinese puzzle-boxes, till everyone had received something; while all the time Aaron sat by, smoking "a foreign cigar" and looking on, smiling at the excited faces and twinkling eyes, listening amusedly to the pleased tones, glad to see no jealousy, and proud of his son in this matter—for it ran with his nature to give, to *dispense*, and with his idea of his place in the life of the island.

Then all went out to the long, deal table, now covered with white cloths, in the big kitchen, where numerous feet set up an incessant, grating noise on the tiled and sanded floor, till all were seated. And amid the babble of tongues and clatter of table-gear, baked meats and boiled meats, rich gravies, green vegetables and white, pies, puddings and custards, stewed fruits and sweet sauces, beer for the elders, and milk and mineral waters for the younger ones,

came and went, in the light of candles, paraffin lamps and the great kitchen fire; with Aaron, smiling in quiet enjoyment at the head of the table; Wallasea, elderly jubilant, at the foot; Dick Shelford and Bob Churchend rudely outgallanting each other to Barbara—who sat between them; Elsie Newlands at a little distance, looking longingly at spruce Bob and jealously at Barbara; while on the opposite side of the board Roger was the object of considerable delicate attentions on the part of Fanny Nazewick—slight, fair, with a love of gossip, but not really spiteful, a touch of ginger, flippant and a little freckled—and 'Betty Churchend—short, fat, red-faced, romantic-minded, tender-hearted and dark—all of whose ages ranged between fifteen and eighteen years, as was the case with the younger ones generally.

Giving a further character to the unusual occasion, all who could find room for their presents had placed them on the table, by their plates; and Jenny, the marmoset, crouched demurely in a chair—to the back of which her chain was fastened so that she could not touch the table—between the schoolmistress and a girl who tried to induce the animal to eat a bit of everything she had herself; while the parrot's cage dangled temporarily from a bacon hook in one of the beams overhead, screeching alternately from time to time, then speaking one of the few phrases she had learnt aboard ship, till—with that opportuneness which usually blesses such occasions—just as Nazewick had called to Margaret to bring back a particular

pudding, that he might have a third helping, Poll cried out, "Here, damn it, Bill." Whereat around the table went a roar, which the bird strove hard to imitate. Margaret, the schoolmistress and the girls generally looked at one another with shocked expressions, mostly assumed by the elder girls, in whose eyes there were belying twinkles. Aaron tried to appear as if he had not heard Poll's remark, but his effort was a failure that ended in a broad smile. The youths were tittering openly. Nazewick laughed, glanced up at the bird, and said loudly:

"I say, young woman, better language! You'll have to go to school a bit, you will."

Then from between Poll's beak there came a discordant series of sounds, meant for a laugh, that set all the youngsters and most of their elders laughing hilariously at Nazewick's expense; while she cried, "Belay there! Sugar!"

In the parlor afterward there were games, the big, round, Spanish mahogany table being trundled back to the wall, with its top tilted upright. (Aaron was proud of "the old things," for the reasons that they had, in part, been his grandfather's, that they *were* old, and that they *were* his.) "Trencher," various kinds of "Forfeits," "Marrying the Widow," "Postman's Knock," and the like, each had its turn; the general choice by the youngsters—who were the M. C.'s here—being, at every change, for the game in which kissing was a recognized feature.

Thus were early preferences seen, winked at,

chaffed, or noted down more significantly, to be afterward discussed and condemned; for the light and immediate recognition was the accepted law which everybody understood. So that when Roger thrice sat in the chair for the "Widow" (Fanny Nazewick on those occasions), and she turned her back on him each time; and when she, as "Postman," brought two separate "letters" for Dick Shelford—who had already shown, by the same means, that Barbara was the girl for him—it was seen that the four were running a sort of race, with Barbara first and Roger last. It only needed for Atalanta in front to turn and chase Roger in order to turn the whole matter into a circle. But there appeared to be no likelihood of this happening.

Nor did Aaron see it, or think of it in any form, as he sat in his armchair, alternately playing whist or cribbage with his neighbors, and commenting on and laughing at the younger ones' doings; while incidentally he noted that Barbara showed no preference for any one of the youths. It was to his secret pleasure that—in the sense of the "widow" in the chair—she turned her back on them all, and brought "letters" only for girls or for boys younger than herself.

Then, near the end of the evening, there arose a cloud that was destined to overshadow Aaron's life to some extent and for years afterward. This began in a very small way. He and Wallasea were partners, as usual. They had experienced a long run of ill-

luck—privately annoying to Aaron, as a leading man and generally a winner—and were beginning to win, when Wallasea (in a moment of abstraction, due to Roger leaning over his shoulder and asking a question) failed to return Aaron's lead, whereby they lost two tricks that cost them the rubber.

"What on earth did you want to be so foolish for!" Aaron grumbled, after a few remarks in reference to the mistake.

"I wasn't foolish. I didn't see it—that was all," answered the other testily and stubbornly; he being one who would not admit an error, even when he knew that he was wrong.

"It *was* foolish! It *was silly!*" said Aaron, irritated at being one of the beaten party.

More words followed, at first with no animosity, then with asperity on Wallasea's side and pointed yet dignified complaint on Aaron's; till the former said, loud enough for all the room to hear, the others having become partially silenced by the "words" in the corner:

"Look here, Rugwood, don't think you're goin' to lay down the law to me, an' chide me as if I was a youngster——"

"I'm laying down no law."

"Yes, you are—just as you always do to everybody sooner or later." And up stood Wallasea, a short, dark, hard-looking, weather-worn man with a thinnish face and fire in his grey eyes.

"No, I don't!"

"Yes, you do! But don't think because you're the successful man of the island that *I'm* goin' to knuckle under to you!"

"What?" cried Aaron, his wrath rising.

"Oh, yes—you can bridle up; but it's a fact, all the same—you think everybody's going to let you be boss!" was the biting retort.

"All I said was it was foolish, and I say it again," put in Aaron, with some idea of checking the quarrel.

But Wallasea blurted out: "It's a lie! I'm no more a fool than you are, *Mr. Rugwood!* Making a mark o' me before everybody!"

Aaron was replying, when some of the other grown-ups interfered to pacify them. These efforts were in vain. The trouble was deepening, when Barbara went over to Aaron, took his hand in both of hers, said, "Don't quarrel—come away"; and he crossed the room with her, silent under her influence. Thereupon Wallasea walked out, declaring that he would never darken the doorway again until an apology was made to him, and subsequently to remember and point significantly to the way in which he went aside with Barbara, when he paid no heed to anyone else.

Naturally, this painful episode broke up the gathering. After a short, awkward pause, two of the guests looked suddenly at the clock, pretended to be startled at the time of night, hunted for their wraps and presents, said how they had enjoyed themselves and went home. Some of the elders tried to assure Aaron that "it would soon blow over," and departed; in ten

minutes all were gone. Barbara and Roger went to bed, the latter secretly troubled in his mind that his action was really to blame for the upset. Then Aaron sat down to smoke and think, pained considerably at this "difference" between him and his most intimate friend in Foulness, yet without a thought of his having a share in the fault, or of his ever being the first to heal up the breach.

## CHAPTER V

EARLY next day, according to arrangements made amongst themselves during the previous evening, Roger and Barbara, Dick Shelford and Fanny Nazewick, Fred Wallasea and Betty Churchend, and Betty's brother, Bob, and Elsie Newlands all set out for a day at Southend. This order of their going was not haphazard. The custom was that each youth should "stand treat" all the day for one girl; and, after some haggling, the girls had taken on themselves the choice of escort. This was mainly at Barbara's instance. Wishing to be free of Dick, she chose Roger, knowing that Fanny wanted Dick, and that Elsie would select Bob, leaving Fred for Betty—as the last one desired, but had not the courage to pick for herself at the beginning.

Bob drove them to Shoebury Station, in his father's big wagonette, which was kept solely for summer parties of visitors to the island. A loud and jovial send-off was given them at The Dragon and the big, old, black windmill and thereabouts as they rattled past, and went down to the shore in the bright, half-warm, yet sharp morning air, while the great sea fell away from their long sand-drive—a smooth sheet of

misty, pinky-grey, the further edge of which could hardly be seen because of the vagueness of the horizon. The day was fine, and they made it a glad one to them. They went for merriment and discovered it, or made it, heedless of the London East-End element which they met here and there—till, by some swing-boats in the afternoon, Fred and Dick found themselves up against two pale-faced, button-decked young costers. In a moment the latter were joined by three others, then in stepped Roger and Bob. Some words passed between the two sets of youths—for there was hardly a young man among them.

Toward the end of the affair the town-set edged this off into laughing derision that had in it more chagrin than sting; and, solely because of the country youths' forbidding fists and generally strong appearance, what would otherwise have been an ugly brawl passed into nothing—much to the relief of the girls, who there and then persuaded their cavaliers away to more quieter pleasures in less noisy parts of the town and the riverside. When night came, and it was time for the party to go back, in order to take the sands on the next ebbtide, they had enjoyed their fill, mentally and physically, of sports and holiday meals; hence it was a gay and rather tired eight that filled a compartment at the station. Hardly had the train started when, in the midst of some hilarity among the others, Betty raised her round, earnest, red face and remarked generally:

“It’s a pity that Mr. Rugwood and Mr. Wallasea

quarrelled last night. Don't you think we could help them to make it up?"

In a moment there was silence. Her habitual seriousness had communicated itself to the party, along with the gravity of the subject.

"Oh, I don't know. It's their affair. Why not let 'em alone," presently said Bob, who was of an easy-going temperament, rather indifferent to most things except his own comfort.

"That's what I think," put in Elsie, straightening up her tall, willowy figure, and turning her unusually fair face to Bob, whose opinions she was always ready to uphold. But as she was known to be even more selfish than he was, her words had no effect on the others.

"Well, I think it would be a good thing—something we ought to try and do," said Fred energetically. Never afraid or slow to express an opinion, and as quick in action as in words, he soon brought agreement from Barbara, Roger and Dick—the last being more anxious to please Barbara than to see the breach healed up.

Thus it was arranged that the three girls (for Elsie and Bob said they would "rather not meddle in it") should, on the following day, act as a deputation to Wallasea; while Roger, Dick and Fred went to Aaron, whom everybody thought would be the easier of the two men to manage. In pitting the feminine element against the harder man there was some of the ancient,

evergreen wisdom of the serpent. So the matter was settled, and their merry moods came back.

On the marshland road, between the village of Wakering and Wakering "stairs"—where the sands "road" ended—they were surprised to meet Roger's father, mounted. Moonlit and fine though the night was (without which the party would not have stayed till darkness set in), he could not trust Barbara along those seven miles of sands, unless he was there to see that all went well. But this was partly his secret. Openly he had come to guide them all; and he rode in front, a horse's length or so, till they were once more safely on the island; then he let the waggonette pass him, and kept close behind, to hear how they had enjoyed themselves.

True to the compact, the two deputations carried out their agreement, on the following day—all to no purpose, however. Wallasea swore he would "not budge a step till Mr. Rugwood took his words back"; and, equally firm, Aaron maintained that he had neither meant nor said anything wrong, for which reason there was nothing to take back. When the futility of their action became apparent to the young people, Fred declared that the quarrel should never make any difference to him in his relations with the Rugwoods generally; and there the matter seemed likely to remain always. Others afterward recollect ed that it was during this home-coming of Roger's that Fred and he seemed to be more like chums than they had ever been before; but they were not aware that

this was largely due to quiet talks, between the youths, of life at sea.

That evening, while Barbara was helping Margaret with some household matter in the kitchen, Roger looked up from what he was reading and said quietly:

"I'm very sorry for what took place last night, father."

"And I'm glad you are, my boy—it shows your sensibility in a case like this; for I'm rather upset at it. Mr. Wallasea was a very dear friend, as I daresay you know." It was not in Aaron to admit that he was more than "rather" troubled at the quarrel.

"Yes, I knew you were fond of him, that's why I'm so sorry for my share in it."

"At what? Your share?"

"Well, yes. I suppose I was partly to blame, anyway," was Roger's reply, made hesitatingly because of his father's sudden change of manner and tone, which showed him that his admission was something of a surprise, not the known fact that he had thought it to be.

"I don't quite follow you, Roger. What do you mean?" Aaron inquired.

"Well, you know, I asked Mr. Wallasea about the fox terrier I got for him, for the rats, in Burnham just before I went away."

"No, I don't know; and I can't make out what you're driving at. When did you ask him? And what has that to do with the matter at all?" queried his father in a puzzled way and some irritation.

"I asked him when you were playing cards, just before you said he didn't return your lead; and I suppose——"

"I say he *didn't* return my lead!"

"Yes, I say you said so," Roger answered, giving his father a look of surprise.

"Then *you* don't say so? You don't take *my* word for what I say?" came the ominous queries, as Aaron straightened up in his chair, then leaned forward swiftly.

"Of course I do. I merely said you said it because you said it."

"Oh," and Aaron leaned back again, feeling a touch of ridiculousness for having, in the foolish thought that his statement was being doubted, so misconstrued Roger's plain meaning. Roger began to think that he had carried the matter far enough; but his father broke the awkward silence with:

"I see now. You drew his attention away, just when he wanted it most?"

"Yes, that's what I was saying—possibly I did," the son admitted contritely.

"*Possibly.* I should say you did for certain. . . . I shouldn't mince it like that, Roger. Always own square up to a thing, every bit of it, not a part; it looks mean, and you're not mean really. You're only slack—yes, *slack* I should call it; slack in coming up to the scratch. It's the same in everything, you know, Roger; and you ought to know well enough what that means—missing here and missing there

till you make a hash of things generally,—and your life, that is, in the long run. . . . It was the same over your going to sea,—and I don't believe you've got the right thing now. And it was just the same when you let Barbara go into the bull's field and nearly lost her life—slack, just slack, that's all."

Thus the lecture continued, not on the wisdom of letting whist-players alone, but on the poor confessor's particular temperamental shortcomings, showing that his father could now and then get off what he often called "the straight track of common sense." And through it all Roger sat quietly, taking it in that spirit of obedience which had characterized all his dealings with his father; even though at the back of his mind there were brief comparisons between life as a seaman-apprentice and life at home, thoughts of what he was getting for his sympathetic confession, etc.; yet it was not in his mind to complain. Then Barbara entered, putting an end to the matter by her presence; for it was a habit of Aaron's, more regular than he was aware, to carry on no unpleasantness when she was there. But Barbara—already possessed of considerable feminine intuition in certain directions—understood at once that something had gone wrong since she left the parlor. With an inquiring glance from father to son and back again, Barbara resumed her task of knitting winter gloves for Aaron. When she and Roger went upstairs together, after supper, she asked him what had hap-

pened to make him be so glum; his answer was, "Oh, nothing, Barbara," and they parted till morning.

Below Aaron sat and smoked as on the previous night; but not now with his mind occupied solely by Wallasea's quarrel with him. Bearing it persistent company there was much thought, and some unpleasant fruitless questioning, concerning Roger. As to occupation and personal characteristics, a disappointment from the first; then the cause (as Aaron held) of seriously endangering Barbara's life—in which case his treasured domestic unity and peace would have been broken up; now the origin of a painful dispute between him and his closest friend, perhaps the complete loss of the latter. So ran Aaron's thoughts of his son till he began, vaguely as yet, to look on him as being prophetically destined to be, not merely a source of anxiety, but the general cause of great unhappiness to the household. Finally Aaron, with a determined effort, shook his mind as free of this unhealthy train of thought as his nature would allow, and went to bed, thinking that he was possibly doing the youth an injustice and hoping that he was.

When the day came for Roger to join his ship again the old peace—resignation really—had been reestablished between him and his father; but Wallasea had made no move to heal the quarrel, which their neighbors had discussed and now, knowing the obstinacy of both men, considered to be permanent. Yet it would not have become a lasting affair if

Aaron could have had his way. To do him justice, he made a tentative sort of effort to patch the matter up a couple of weeks afterward, in spite of his thinking that he was the blameless one. This was at Shoebury Station one day, when they were both going up the line. Aaron had just opened a carriage-door, as Wallasea hurried up, late and panting, in his best brown leather gaiters, velvet corduroy breeches of a darker tint, his blue-striped, long waistcoat, with flaps to the pockets, a sort of cutaway coat, with bigger flaps, and a billy-cock hat, that was as near being half a sphere as it could be. For the little man, previously knowing that his larger neighbour would be travelling by that train, had come with the intention of not being outshone completely by "*Mr.* Rugwood."

"Good day," said the former, in a quiet, casual way. "Here's room."

But Wallasea went past and disappeared into a compartment further along. From that hour the quarrel was a fixed thing, to the long-felt sorrow of Aaron and to the resentment of his neighbor. Then, in the spring of the following year, some land fell vacant between their two holdings, and by a little sharp practice—nothing illegal yet decidedly unfair—Wallasea got possession of it; which further and deeply angered Aaron, who wanted to buy the land. After this there was never an attempt to pass the time of day on either side; and their neighbors generally (who knew nothing of Wallasea's trick, for the victim of it was hardly the man to brand a former friend

in that way) seemed to Aaron to hold more and more aloof from him. Why and just in what ways he could not have told exactly; but, all the same, that impression became fixed in his mind, making him a little distant in his bearing toward most of them, and causing him to centre himself more on his private affairs; till by-and-bye he gained the secret reputation of having "grown too proud for Foulness Island folk," and there were further whisperings as to "the spirit of the island bringin' him down sooner or later." On the latter point Wallasea had vigorous opinions, which were freely expressed at times, notwithstanding his own efforts—now stronger, in opposition, than they were in friendship—to tread in Aaron's prosperous footsteps. The reason for this was that, fired by Roger's brass-buttoned blue suit, his description of Indian sights, etc., and his silence as to the hardships of life afloat, Fred Wallasea had run away to sea, after uselessly importuning his father to make him an apprentice. And as Wallasea's elder son was a hopeless, house-bound cripple, he now looked to Aaron as being the cause of his loss "for startin' the fat-headed fashion of lettin' his boy be a silly sailor."

Almost on the heels of this Aaron was further, and in a certain way, worse upset at finding that there was some scandal being talked concerning Barbara, Fanny Nazewick, Dick Shelford, Bob Churchend and a few more. This was about them having been seen romping indecorously in the fields, while Barbara

was on her way home from the Rectory, where she went every other evening for special lessons—Aaron's aim being to have her as educated as possible, without going from home. Into the scandal he made quick and vigorous inquiry, secretly strung to his highest at what the upshot might be, and setting some persons' tongues wagging to his and her detriment by the way in which he pursued the matter. For "Who, indeed, was she," said they to one another—mostly women—"that nobody should mention her precious name in such a thing? She was no better than the next, maybe not so good, if the truth was known—even if she was Aaron Rugwood's ward, as they called it! She an' her saucy face!—as fond of the boys as any girl on the island! And why shouldn't she be? It was only Nature!" etc.

Enormously to his relief, however, Aaron found that the scandal was nine-tenths talk. All the same, the breath of it had come Barbara's way; so—much as it pained him, unknown to anyone except himself—he made her a weekly boarder at a school in Southend, and tried to make himself content by having her at home from Saturday to Monday. And in this "fancy schoolin'" those neighbors who disliked him for the success he had gained by unusual hard work and a keen mind, saw another peg whereon to hang their spleen; this was especially the case when it was seen that Barbara was acquiring some "style," as Aaron joyously expressed it to himself, and the gossips called "putting it on." They even blamed her when some

of the other girls, before this schooling was over, began to wear "fancy" gloves on Sundays, and their usual plain ones whenever they went to Wakering or Shoebury.

## CHAPTER VI

THEN, springing out of an incident that happened while Roger was home again, in the summer of the following year—when he was nearly nineteen years of age and Barbara was in her sixteenth, and he, rather to her maidenly satisfaction, ceased to kiss her on his arrival home and his going to sea again—there occurred that which made certain of the islanders say, with real and growing enmity amongst themselves, that “Aaron Rugwood’s head was swelling like a bladder blown up.”

As on the previous return home of his son—who had changed but little in appearance and nothing in habits—Aaron gave a sort of feast to their friends and acquaintances; on this occasion it took the nature of a picnic, in accordance with the season and the weather; and, although the relations between him and a few of his neighbors were scarcely so cordial as they were in previous times, his invitations were accepted freely. He had secured the presence of a fiddling friend in Wakering, and there was to be dancing in the meadow, a sufficient portion of which Aaron had caused to be cut and rolled and beaten to something like a lawn-condition. The day was excellently propitious for muslin frocks, gay ribbons

and generally fine attire. The viands, drinks, etc., had been sent to the scene of the intended merry-making; and Aaron, Roger, Barbara and several of their intimates started for the meeting-place. On the party entering the nearer end of the field, Barbara made to gather some wild roses close by, with which to decorate the "table." As she stretched her arms up the hedge, Roger and Fred Wallasea went to help her. When they were a few yards from her, she screamed, leapt aside, and placed one hand on the calf of her left leg. The young men sprang forward. Aaron turned and rushed after them.

"It's an adder!" shouted Roger, his eyes flashing their rare fires, as he pointed to where a lithe, brownish length of some two feet was gliding hurriedly up and down through the grass by the hedgeside.

"An adder! An adder!" cried the others, running toward where Barbara stood, stooping to her wounded leg.

Aaron arrived at her side, as Fred was asking her if the snake had bitten her. With a quick motion of his arm Aaron swept the young man out of his way. Within a minute he had thrown Barbara on the grass, turned up her clothing, torn down her stocking, and fastened his lips leach-like on the red spot that indicated where the viper had struck. In several ways Aaron was not of the common make of his neighbors. At times as quick to act as to think, whatever the act might be, this was his instantaneous method of dealing with the situation, instead of hurrying Barbara home,

and telegraphing (as the tide was up over the island's road-communication with the mainland) to Wakering for Dr. Potton. He had no thought of the girl's modesty and bare leg, although she hastily thrust down her skirt to the side of his face, as the others gathered around—every one of them with an exclamation on what had happened or what should be done. But, heedless of all else, Aaron sucked, and sucked with every ounce of power there was in his strong mouth; while one suggested the getting of some water, and Fred—usually quicker in action than in asking questions—ran to the house for brandy.

"Roger," said Aaron presently, spitting on the grass, then applying himself to the wound again. Roger was out of sight. Some of the onlookers shouted for him. "Never mind," Aaron put in, emptying his mouth as before. "Bob, run, run to the post office, quick. Wire Dr. Potton." He took another big suck. "Wire everything—make it plain, don't stint words." Again he was at the wound, and Bob, his easy-going ways momentarily forgotten, was away at the top of his speed, burning hot though the sun was. "One of you slip off to the house and bring whiskey," and down went his head once more to Barbara's leg, as another messenger sped away on his errand. Aaron had remembered reading that whiskey was an antidote for the bite of rattlesnakes.

By this time a couple of the group had rushed with the news toward those who, at the other end of the meadow, were making merry around the man with the

fiddle. But a few of them, seeming to divine that something serious had occurred, were already breaking away to learn what had happened. The two parties met; the tidings flew onward to where, in the shade cast by some trees, the cloth had been spread, its corners held down with big dishes of cool custard. As the little crowd drew near, Aaron was binding his and the elder Churchend's ties, knotted together, around Barbara's leg, just above the wound, till the white flesh on both sides stood up in high ridges. In the meantime there had been some ejaculating bits of advice from a few of the older friends; but most of them knew—as Barbara did, hence her quietude—that where Aaron took the managing hand he accepted the advice of no one. When this task was done, he made a tug at her clothes to hide the bare, round leg; but they were too short. Barbara bent her legs under her skirts, as Aaron jerked off his jacket and threw it over them, saying, rather hoarsely:

"How do you feel now?"

"Only a bit faint. There isn't much pain now," was her answer, as she half-sat, half-lay on the grass, and had done all through the ordeal, supporting herself on one hand; while with the other she partially hid her pale, shamed face in a handkerchief.

Aaron turned about, wiping the perspiration from his face, then singled out the servant and bade her hurry home and get things ready for poultices. The girl went, and he said: "Go back to the good things, please—all of you, except Mrs. Churchend and Mar-

garet—and make yourselves happy." No one moved. "You won't do any good here," he added; "and, besides, Barbara will feel much more at ease, I'm sure, if you go away a bit." The idea had just entered his mind that Barbara would be shy at having had so much of her leg and clothing exposed. At this they turned away and sauntered back, in the hot sunlight, to the other end of the field.

Then Bob arrived with the brandy. Aaron added a little to some water, gave Barbara a drink, and up came Dick Shelford, panting, with the whiskey. Aaron washed out his mouth with some of the latter, sucked the wound again for a while, used more of the spirit as before, then saturated a handkerchief with it and tied the linen on the wound. As he was doing this Roger appeared from the other side of the hedge, that fire still in his eyes but fading now, and, with a sharp-pointed stick stuck through the head of the viper; and Bob cried:

"That's the one that made at Sam Naylor's father, a month since! There's the scotch he made on its tail when it got away!" He pointed excitedly to a fresh scar near the end of the viper's tail.

Knowing that his father would not let him take a foremost, and barely a secondary, hand in ministering to Barbara (merely because, as he supposed, of his father's masterly habits), Roger had quickly cut and sharpened the end of a thorn branch, followed the track of the snake, overtaken and fought it, knocked it senseless, then driven the stick through its head.

For this Aaron warmly commended him, feeling proud that his son had done the real, right thing here, without being slack about it; and Barbara looked up at him, a deep light in her eyes momentarily, but with a shudder running through her as her gaze took in the dying viper. Then, after sending Roger and young Churchend to see the picnic through, Aaron—much as he had done four years earlier—and accompanied by Margaret and Bob's mother—took Barbara in his arms, despite the heat, and carried her home; this, also, was too precious a task for others to share. There, the women applied poultices, made, at his insistence, of bread and hot whiskey; until Dr. Potton arrived and changed them for more professional remedies, saying, when all was finished and the viper had been inspected, that Aaron had possibly saved the girl's life—adder's poison was not often fatal. But, at any rate, he (Aaron) had averted a serious, likely enough dangerous, illness by his prompt action and whiskey poultices. And, as this was said in the presence of Margaret and Mrs. Churchend—the latter being a dominating sort of woman, as her husband knew, and rather an admirer of "the successful man"—its retailment gave it increased value till it reached Wallasea and a few others.

## CHAPTER VII

THAT evening, after half-hearted attempts had resulted in making the picnic a partial success for all but the three who were most concerned in it, and as Aaron and Roger sat smoking silently under the verandah, in a cool breeze that smelt of the sea from which it blew, the father said :

"It's rather hard on you, Roger, that there should always be trouble when you're here."

"Oh; I don't know," came the slow answer. Roger had been too deep in his own thoughts for him to have noticed the suggestion of irony that had accompanied his father's words. "It isn't pleasant, of course, for any of us; but I suppose these things would happen all the same if I wasn't here."

"Do you think so?"

Roger became more alert, with a dawning idea that his father had been dwelling on this subject and that there was more meaning in what he said than the words implied.

"Think so? I don't see what you mean," said he, rather puzzled, and with a tinge of the resentment that long habit kept at the back of his mind.

"Well, the bull affair might have happened, but as you were there you ought to have stopped it," Aaron began, more casually than with a sense of reproof or

accusation, when Roger interrupted by asking in surprise:

"What—the bull?"

"No; Barbara going where he was." Roger somewhat recoiled on himself, looking along the garden and wondering if the ghost of that matter was ever to be laid. "Then, you know, when you were home before you caused me and Mr. Wallasea to quarrel so that it's never been made up. However, I must admit you'd nothing to do with the worst part of it," Aaron concluded, feeling that he must be just, although to do so made a hole in his argument; and the son at once said:

"And you can't blame me for this, because I'd nothing to do with it."

"No, I don't *blame* you; I only say that if you hadn't been here it wouldn't have come about, because there wouldn't have been any picnic to-day in that meadow." It was specious reasoning, and Roger thought so, but he said nothing. "Still, you can't help everything that happens badly where you are. Only it seems fated for you to be there and have something to do with them when they do happen, and that's the queer part about it."

Roger remained silent and went to bed in a miserable state of mind. The truth was, that Aaron had spent some time on his son's connection with the unlucky events of the household, till he had grown to look on him as a harbinger of ill-omen, if not of direct trouble; then, as a better feeling took its place,

under the influence of conversation, he had seen the pity of it all and felt rather sorry for Roger.

At the end of eight or nine days Barbara was about pretty much as usual. Then there were other pleasure gatherings, in part to make up for the spoilt picnic that was to have been so grand, including day-trips to places on the mainland. Besides these, there were evening meetings at the houses of the young men and women, who, as a party, planned and carried out each piece of enjoyment. But, wherever they went, or whatever they did, some of them, as well as older persons who happened to be present, always noticed—privately at the time and discussed afterward—that Roger seemed to have grown quite heedless of the feminine element. He had never shown any decided leaning toward the opposite sex, as everybody knew. But then, they argued, he was a man now—nearly twenty—not a boy, and should be thinking of having a wife some day. Instead of which he appeared to becoming more and more a dreamer, and was certainly, in the opinion of most of them, "not shaping to be a marrying man at all." To his father, who also recognized this, it was only another, and not an unsuspected, phase of his general slackness. But none of them knew or guessed of Roger's private thoughts on this very subject—thoughts that came to him mostly just after Barbara had said "good night" and gone upstairs, leaving the bourgeois Georgian sort of parlor stiff, antiquated and fusty, in comparison to the fresh, sweet, well-car-

ried beauty of budding womanliness, which she had suddenly taken out of it—with not a thought of her own, that she filled more than a kind of sister-friend's place in his mind. In fact, on the few occasions when she found him watching her rather unusually and always in quiet moments, she put what seemed to be a faint interest down to the change in herself—to that "style" which she had acquired at the Southend school; and, as both of them were at the most diffident and sensitive ages of their lives, with a "slacker" who should have been the leader, no byway channel was opened up to personal matters which might have led to greater ends. Thus Roger went to sea again, with a new sensation creeping to life in him, and, with two pictures rising now and then in his memory, despite the stress and moil of shipboard life (which he now so disliked), Barbara, as she left the parlor at nights, and in the viper incident, with all the present and possible circumstances of the latter.

In the meantime that exciting occurrence had brought back her old habit of walking in her sleep, and an occasional pain where the wound had been, making her limp a little while it lasted. It was this latter outcome of the affair that caused Aaron to be talked of as having a swollen head. In a fit of what appeared to be unusual generosity, but really out of a feeling that was much more deeply rooted in his being, he bought Barbara a pony to ride. True, he did not go the length of a proper riding-habit, etc.; but it led at once to that which he had opposed, during the past

year or so, i. e., longer frocks, and a specially made one, of more than ordinary walking length, for her to wear whenever she rode to Wakering or Shoebury. Of excellent build and almost fully grown in the matter of height, it had been necessary—"decent," Margaret had said—for some time past that Barbara should hide more of her shapely legs under skirts. But, with the secret desire to keep her a girl, a young girl, as long as possible, Aaron had withheld held his consent; and Barbara had gone free of the more ample garments in which Margaret wished to clothe her, she, in her own mind, caring little whatever way the matter went, and not particularly desirous of the day when she would have to put her hair up.

Now the change had come; and what, with it and the further quietude—temporary to an extent, yet leaving a certain residue behind—that had been stamped upon her deportment by the snake incident, Barbara seemed to have suddenly become a woman. And many a time in his secret heart Aaron looked on her, realized this fact, and trembled within himself; it aroused in him a dread that, apart from its real source, was curious—a dread that grew as she grew in the beauty of physical proportions and attractiveness of feature, showing a mind and body that were framed for enjoyment, motherhood, and the full delight of life as she knew it; for Barbara had no desire to roam, no feeling for a life beyond her knowledge. It was at these times of contemplation, as she passed toward her eighteenth year, that Aaron feared most, lest she

should fall in love; given that such a crowning misfortune did not break into his, already partially broken, unity of domestic peace and pride, and he felt that he could withstand any other shock that life might bring him.

Instead of Barbara being won away from Aaron, circumstances lent their aid the other way. Although the change in his neighbors' attitude toward him had taken some years to gain any definite outward expression, and was even still rather an under-current than a surface movement on the slow stream of life on the island, it was there; and Barbara was aware of its existence, saw many little, indirect instances of it, knew how unjust it was, felt—according to her feminine nature—that it was more unjust still, and was drawn all the closer in sympathy and spirit to Aaron. But in this he saw—for he recognized her leaning—only a good woman's natural sympathy for the weaker side in an unjustified conflict; he knew of, dared not hope for, any deeper or more personal binding. The general had sent her to the particular—he argued from the particular, without knowing it as such—to the general.

Then Dick Shelford's father was drowned, by "taking the sands" too late on a dark night, and with an incoming tide, i. e., starting along the sands "road," seven miles from end to end, and marked here and there by a pole to keep drivers at night time off the deep, black, treacherous mud that bordered the "road" in places on its island side. It was said that on this oc-

casion, as on some others, Shelford was not so sober as he ought to have been; but the men and women of more charitable minds were satisfied to hold up his untimely end to such of their own men-folk as were at times too venturesome in the same way. His death put Dick, at the age of twenty-six, into possession of their farm; it also left a vacancy on the District Council, and Aaron put up for election, as the parish's new representative. It was this affair that brought home to him the truth of how he stood in the eyes of his neighbors. Churchend and Nazewick were the only two members of the Parish Council who voted for him. He went home from that meeting with his pride in an unenviable condition, asking himself, the hedges, the fields, the sky, the night, what he had done to deserve their spleen. Nothing, that he could see, except to have made as more profit during the past twelve or fourteen years than any two or three of them.

In his anger—rightly, without knowing it—Aaron blamed Wallasea for some of the feeling against him. But he was not the man to sit down quietly under it all. Soon afterward the lease of a neighboring farm was about to fall in; it was occupied by Easten, an envious, plodding, descendant of the Easten who had “gone to ruin in trying to buy up the island.” He had shown the most dislike to Aaron, and had lately become a crony of Wallasea’s. Some forty-odd acres of the land formed a wedge into the south side of Aaron’s increasing number of fields. So, on hearing

that Easten had not decided to renew his lease, Aaron made the owner a bid to buy the land. This "raised the dust." Wallasea stepped in with a higher figure. The owner played for all he could get. Aaron offered more still. Then the owner put the land up to proper auction, in Rochford. Aaron was there, determined to be the buyer even if the purchase took his last spare pound. In the course of the bidding it was plain to see that his opponents were leagued against him; but he outbid them, and came away victorious—biting his lip that they had made him pay nearly twice the value of the land. From that day forward it was always a bitter point with Aaron that his fellow-farmers were venomously jealous at heart for the bare reason, he supposed, that he was "the successful man of the island." But there were certain smaller, personal matters which his anger did not take into account. And Barbara, knowing this set against him, knew also how little he deserved it, saw his qualities through the binoculars of affection, pitied him, and showed her pity from day to day.

And how this attitude of hers smelt sweet in Aaron's nostrils, often filling his heart with rich joy as he went about his fields in the daytime, saw his neighbors' holdings around him—with the sea and rivers bounding them all in—and thought of how they had narrowed down that sociability of which he was fond, yet for which he had found a dear substitute, that grew dearer and dearer, in her sympathy with him and her habit of reading to him on winter

evenings. But it also brought him many an hour of pain, as he watched the development of her feminine attractions, thinking how easy it would surely be for her to fall in love with some young man on the island or at Wakering; for it had now grown to be her custom to ride her big pony into that mainland village once or twice a week to order the household stores and pay the bills—there being no shop on Foulness—whereby she had naturally become acquainted with young men there.

Then one night Aaron came very near to giving words to the secret that was growing almost too strong for his power of repression. A new rector, with a desire to make rural life more acceptable to those whose lots were cast in it, had started fortnightly dances and other forms of entertainment in the village school-room, with special nights twice a week for men and youths. There was also a class for "First Aid," at which Barbara was diligent enough to come out at the top. In addition, she went regularly, as one of the rector's Sunday-school teachers and best general helps, seeing that she could both sing and play fairly well for Foulness, and was always bright and ready with some suggestion in the hour of need. On these evenings it was the habit of Aaron—who would not attend the gatherings himself—to take Barbara there and fetch her back when the entertainment was over. On this particular night he, on his second errand, walked quietly into the doorway of the big porch, which was also used as a cloak-room. At that moment

Barbara was reaching down her wraps, with Dick Shelford—the only other person present—close behind, unknown to her, and on the point of taking her head between his hands and drawing it back to kiss her. With two quick strides Aaron was near enough to put his hand between their heads, just in time for Dick to kiss his hand, as Barbara let out a low ejaculation of surprise and annoyance. Dick fell back and to one side withal, amazed and chagrined at the interruption.

"There'll be time enough for that, Dick, when Barbara gives you leave for it," said Aaron, in a hard voice, taking her jacket and helping her to put it on, as she added:

"Yes, indeed it will, and that won't be yet for a long time to come! I shall tell the Rector about this!"

A few more words were said; but Dick did not attempt to excuse himself. Barbara went into the school-room, and Dick, saying sneeringly. "P'r'aps you want her yourself, Mr. Rugwood," turned in there also.

On their way home, and during their short time together in the parlor after supper, Aaron found it extremely difficult to keep the secret that worked him so much alternating joy and dread day after day. But when Barbara had retired and he sat by the window, smoking his pipe and listening mechanically to the fierce wind that whistled in from seaward, and the fire of his passion had died away again into the bounds of control, he felt glad that he had not spoken. Long ago he had made the resolve with himself to

wait till she was a woman, rather than to appeal to her immaturity; and, if someone came in and won before that time arrived—well, he would have the satisfaction of knowing that he had been a man in it all. And once more there was that old, consuming dread, until he trembled in spite of himself, then left his chair and walked about the room.

## CHAPTER VIII

TRUE to her word—although Aaron said tentatively that he thought “it might as well be let alone now”—on the following day Barbara “went to the Rector,” not that she had become in any degree a prude, or had the least notion of the hornets’ nest that she was stirring up around them all. Her action was due to several matters: She had declared she would, and, in a case of this sort, her word must be kept; she was honestly incensed at the liberty that Dick had been about to take unfairly (if they had been boy-and-girl free with each other years before he ought to know better than to think he would be allowed to do the same now); she owed it to Aaron and to her well-being in his eyes to show a proper animosity to the action; and it would account for her holding aloof a while from the entertainments, as she privately intended to, with a curious feeling of satisfaction—which she neither understood nor attempted to analyze, and put aside rather hurriedly—that this would show Aaron what little store she set by the entertainments, and how much she resented Dick’s unlicensed attempt to kiss her.

As a matter of course this “going to the Rector” “put the fat in the fire” completely, much more completely than Barbara had expected, and even more so

than Aaron had foreseen when he half-heartedly suggested the wisdom of leaving the affair where it was. It occasioned immediately much coming and going, fending and proving, high words and growing ill-feeling, general hints at worse things in connection with the entertainments (wherein the dull, satisfied plodders referred vaguely to prophecies which they thought they had spoken on the innovation when it began), subtle inuendoes—peculiar to the uneducated East Anglian mind—that certain persons were far from being as good as they would like the island to think they were; then direct charges, in answer to cornering questions, threats of the law and of thrashings, etc., till Foulness was in an actual ferment. The Rector was beside himself with annoyance, impotence, and the mass of rebutting evidence and calumny that surged around him; blows were struck in odd, out-of-the-way instances; Barbara's fair name was smirched, causing her to shed scalding tears of helpless indignation and injury; rather to the joy of fair, gingery Fanny Naze-wick, who was openly known to be "throwing her freckles at Dick Shelford." Then, in his rage, Aaron went forth, literally challenging the whole island to stand up in front of him and utter scandal in connection with Barbara's name.

This last action happened on a Saturday afternoon, following a wet morning, when the tide prevented the islanders from going to Wakering, and most of the men were in or near The Dragon, by the black windmill, in the middle of what village there was. Aaron's

bulky figure stalked into the tap-room, his wrath giving to his appearance and manner a double quantity of the dominating spirit that had made him successful and disliked; and his very presence, by its rarity, proclaiming something very unusual.

"Who's here that's got a word to say against Barbara—or against me?" he asked, ready to double up the first man that gave an affirmative answer. . . . "Because if any one of you's got a grudge to spite, now's the time."

Two or three of the men made half-pacific, half-sullen replies of an indirect nature; elderly, drawling Nazewick adding, partially on account of his age and in part because such friendship as there always had been between him and Aaron was still unbroken:

"I'd go ho-ome, if I was you, Aa-ron. 'T do-esn't become a-any man to put his ba-ack up at the par-rish; it's sort o' floutin' th' Almi-ighty."

"I'm a God-fearing man; but, by God, I fear no man on Foulness in this matter! No, nor the whole island, either!" was Aaron's answer. . . . "The first man to whose mouth I can trace one of these lies (about Barbara), I'll break him up."

As the silence continued Aaron moved toward the doorway, when Easten said, as a half-satirical question:

"You feel pretty sure o' yourself, then?"

Around swung Aaron, looked straight at him and asked: "Have *you* any doubts?"

This query was quite understood by Easten and

the others; he glanced across at Wallasea, who sat, dark and mute and seemingly uninterested, on the other side of the room. Easten sniggered uneasily and was silent. He would rather lose another forty-odd acres than stand up to his neighbor just then.

The landlord looked over his pump-handles and said: "Now, Mr. Rugwood, please don't make trouble here. I'm a licensed man, bear in mind."

Aaron again began to move out. Then the younger Newlands, near the door, and thinking that as Aaron was going out he would take no notice of him, ventured in slowly with:

"Well, I've got a sister who's no better than she ought to be; but, by gosh, I'll bet she's as good as the next on Foulness, never mind who—. Here, what the b——l!"

Aaron was dragging him outside by the neck of his jacket, etc., spluttering, swearing, struggling to get free, and some of the others following. Aaron would not bring him to book on licensed premises; but once clear of them he jerked the culprit to his feet in front, released him, stood back a pace, and said:

"Now put up your hands. You're a man, same as the rest, an' bigger than some. Up with 'em, or by heaven I'll flatten you!"

Newlands exclaimed that he had meant nothing against Barbara. But his sister—Elsie's elder—had lately been forced into a "wedding o' convenience," for her own sake; everyone knew it, declared that

she had "done it to catch her man"; and Aaron said again:

"Up with 'em, or I'll drop you!" His Barbara compared to a "hot-foot," "light-o'-body" like that! He was flaming with rage. Men, women and children gathered about in a few minutes, and some of the spectators afterward said that "he foamed at the mouth like a beast."

Newlands backed, saying apologetically that he had nothing to fight for, that he had said nothing to anybody's harm; while several of those who stood around added their opinions to the same effect, some of them going the length of shouting that "Ginger" (as Newlands was known) was no match for Aaron. In heart, certainly not, and hardly in bulk or strength; but he had fourteen years less on his shoulders. Barring Dick Shelford there was not a friend of his or Barbara's in the crowd; and, although Dick was too light of heart to carry any depth of resentment beyond the day, he still felt rather sore because of Aaron having made him and "a paltry flirting kiss" the starting point of all this bother.

"Put 'em up!" cried Aaron once more, following Newlands' backward movements, his wrath increasing at this refusal to give him the proper chance to retaliate.

"Let him alone!"

"Go to your *mansion!*"

"You're the biggest! Shame!"

"Lordin' it over everybody!"

Such were some of the taunts and cries from male and female alike, as the two men moved here and there during the first minute or so after Aaron dragged the other into the roadway. And one small boy squared up to another, in caricature of Aaron, saying: "Put 'em up!" to the amusement of such of their elders as were near enough to notice the by-play.

"Will you put 'em up?" he growled, heedless alike of the grown-ups' jibes and of the youngsters' burlesque.

"No," came the low, sullen answer, and the sound of Aaron's flat hand on the side of Newland's face was something to remember for a long time afterward.

In a quick, continuous motion half-around spun the man, "dithered" for a moment, appeared as if his face had been fixed over the right shoulder, and went staggering sideways to the mud; then he began slowly to regain his feet once more.

With a grunt of contempt and a withering look at the nearer ones in front, Aaron was turning away, when he felt a heavy shock. One of Newlands' men and a brother of Wallasea's—lately from the mainland, Southend-way—had charged him, together, one at the side and the other more behind. Blows fell on his back, ribs, and the side of his head; one kicked his right leg, and the other leaped on his back with the aim of carrying him to the ground. By this time Aaron had recovered from the initial onslaught. He turned in the nick of time to give the kicker a left-hander that sent him backward among those who were

closing in, with, it was declared subsequently, "a mark on his face his mother never gave him an' the doctor couldn't take out." As the left arm came in again, his right swung around the other man's waist and jerked him to the front, rather feet upward; then Aaron took him—a small man—in both hands and literally flung him at his fellow.

In an instant there was a general rush. It really seemed like being a case of one man against the parish, except that the women who had suddenly congregated, the three old men who were present, Wallasea and some juveniles held apart. Almost like a bull with a pair of windmill arms, Aaron beat them off, knocking the first one down with a clean blow, lashing out savagely but anyhow at the others, and incidentally meeting a butting head with his knee. Within a minute he had set up more physical suffering than had been caused by him from his youth up to that afternoon. The spectators afterward said that he was like a madman, while he kept his feet. But he had to go down; and this was in the mud by the wall of The Dragon, almost under the tap-room window. Perhaps it was lucky both for them and for him that some one shouted "P'lliceman!" a few moments later; otherwise there might have been a serious case for the county assize. In an instant the attackers drew away from him; in the next he was on his feet, about to rush at them, when a stab of pain in his right side pulled him up shortly. He dropped back to the

low window-ledge and sat there, holding one hand to his side.

The constable had come into sight around the mill, now he hurried forward, seeing that something was wrong. Meanwhile the landlord turned on his doorstep and went inside; Aaron's assailants broke up and moved sullenly and doggedly further away, most of them trying to hide their panting, muddy condition, and keeping their bruised faces from the constable. Some of the more timid ones, young and mature alike, sauntered out of sight, driving the children along with them, and severely admonishing those who daringly flung back the jibes of their elders at Aaron. But the women stood their ground conscious of having physically broken no law, therefore prepared to brazen out their presence and their moral share in the beginning of the matter. It was to Aaron that the constable went at once and asked what had happened.

"Oh; a few of 'em set on to me, that's all, after—after I'd boxed one of 'em's ears," Aaron said painfully, as he wiped his face. He was rather white and gasped for breath. The constable, thinking that he was seriously hurt, took a deeper interest in the affair, and inquired who "the few" were. "There they are—the lot of them, practically. All to one!—the mean, cowardly-hearted lot."

"You should let people alone, an' mind your own business," put in some of the women.

Aaron only glared at them in answer. The constable asked further questions generally; but Aaron

would give him no specific information. In effect his reply was: There they are; if you want to summons them, summons them all. Then he called for the landlord to bring him some brandy. When he had drank the liquor he stood up from the windowsill; his color came back, but the pain in his side was severe unless he kept his back in a set position. At this point Bob Churchend and Harry Nazewick came on the scene and at once heard what had occurred; with the result that, while Bob's apathy of temperament kept him neutral, Harry went straight over to Aaron and offered his sympathy and help. Aaron thanked him, and began to walk slowly across to the post office, resting one hand on Harry's shoulder, feeling that he had some ribs broken, and saying to the constable:

"I'm going home, when I've wired for Dr. Potton; p'r'aps you'd better come with me as far, in case I give out on the way."

So the telegram was sent; then, with Harry still at his side, Aaron started to walk the mile and a third home, watched away by those who had lingered about, talking in sullen whispers; he declaring that he would have no assistance—not from any householder in Foulness from this day onward.

## CHAPTER IX

AARON's surmise was quite correct as to his injury. He had three ribs broken; but he would not supply any information that might lead to a police-court case, and, as the other side was even more reticent on the subject, there it had to remain. Nor would Aaron give Barbara any definite particulars of the fight. It was not in him to talk of such an affair, and still less of the pain he got in it, to the unmeaning cause of it all, especially when that cause was Barbara. Besides, he had grown to recognize her power of admonition—brief, pointed, eminently practical, yet not said unkindly or governingly—in cases where he stumbled off “the straight track of common sense.”

On the other hand, Barbara had much to say to all who would discuss the matter with her. It was of no moment to her what garbled versions she heard; enough Aaron was hurt and his assailants had been many. Thus, wherever she went on the island, long and severe were her condemnations of “the cowards,” etc. It was on the cards that, if she could have compassed such an end, she would have had the delinquents taken before the magistrates and dealt with rigorously. Naturally, all this caused the venomous gossip to become less general and to centre more on

Barbara, till Fanny Nazewick rather spitefully drew her attention particularly to what was being said about her position at Rugwood House—now that she had reached the glamorous threshold of womanhood. This was quite a new view to Barbara, who had grown up so much a part of the Rugwood *ménage* as to be staggered by anyone thinking that she was, or could be, *anything* but what she was—an innocent and natural item in the household.

For a week or two—while nursing Aaron and being drawn all the time into deeper sympathy with him—Barbara was unusually quiet. These wicked and cruel queries and suggestions—all unknown to Aaron—as to her place in the house, and his oft-noted sense of possession of her, were making her wonder if it was possible for her to find a suitable home elsewhere. There was considerable pain in the mere thought of such an action. To leave Aaron, even when he was quite well again, with all this bitterness, envy, and isolation about him—why, if they were no more than just good friends it would be a mean thing to do, and Barbara hated meanness. And they were more than friends, her thoughts ran on—more than friends in the ordinary way; she supposed it was because they had lived in the same house, eaten at the same table, since before her earliest recollection. To leave Aaron now would break his heart, she was sure of that—with faint under-touches of thought and a little warmer feeling concerning certain looks and out-of-the-way kindnesses of his during the past year

or two. And her own heart? No; she was not going to be ousted from her proper home and made miserable, and make Aaron the same, to suit a parcel of village gossips. She was quite happy where she was, had no desire to leave the place; and Aaron was happy enough, too, when the busybodies left him and her alone. So she would not be driven away by them, let them say what they liked. What a simpleton she would be to bring so much suffering on Aaron and herself to please such a wicked-minded lot as they were! Finally she went to earnest Betty for "a talk," and returned, fixed in her intention; she and Betty having become bosom friends since Fred Wallasea ran away to sea.

Thus, her practical common sense and loyalty having come to the rescue, Barbara put the whole affair and its concomitants out of her mind, became at once as cheerful as ever, and did her best to make Aaron forget that matters between him and their neighbors generally were not as he would have had them be.

About a fortnight after the mêlée by The Dragon, one forenoon when a bitter wind was blowing in from the sea, seeking out thin places and making everybody shiver more or less, Wallasea came storming to the front door of Rugwood House—two very unusual happenings in one. He wanted to see *Mr.* Rugwood; within a few moments he wanted to see and know many other things. Aaron, stiff with the plaster that was still around him, and forbidden to go beyond the confines of the farmstead, was sitting in the parlor,

reading; when he saw Wallasea come hurriedly and excitedly to the door, and, not wishing to have an altercation with his former friend, he called Margaret to the door. But Barbara appeared and went instead.

"I want to see *Mr.* Rugwood," was Wallasea's demand, as he stood squarely in the big porch, his obstinacy thick upon his short, close-knitted figure, and his dark face turned up toward Barbara's, with passion flaming in his eyes, and his black beard quivering in his haste to say more than one word at once.

"I'm afraid you can't just now, Mr. Wallasea," said she pacifically, noting that the left side of his coat was torn, and that he appeared generally to have just gone through a rather rough experience.

"But I say I *want* to see him!"

Barbara understood the command and replied, a little firmly now: "And I say I'm afraid you can't."

"But I say I *WILL!* *Who is he*—the lord o' the manor!—that I should come to his door an' be told I can't see him? I'm a freehold farmer! An' he's no more!"

"No, Mr. Wallasea; but he is an invalid, in a way, and that's why you can't see him," said Barbara, with a slight touch of forcible irony in her tone and manner.

"Invalid be blowed! He's no more an invalid 'an I am, or nearly was just now, all through that damned bull of his! Where is he, I say? Tell him to come out here, like a man!"

Barbara almost smiled in his face, at this sudden

picture of ludicrousness that arose in her mind—"little, black Mr. Wallasea" *commanding* Aaron, and speaking as if Aaron was not a man. "Oh, it's too funny for anything," she said to herself; then aloud: "But if you'll tell me what's the matter, I'll go and tell him, and—"

"What is it, Ben?" asked Aaron, calmly, at Barbara's back. He had heard the references both to him and his *Pride of the Marshes*—which was then taking prizes at cattle-shows—and he could not withstand either of them. "Come in, Barbara."

Knowing that this meant her to retire from the scene, and determined not to, Barbara stood aside and a little further indoors withal, saying: "But you are not to stand here, in this bitter wind. You know what Dr. Potton said about keeping warm."

Aaron advanced, replying to her remarks, and stood in front of Wallasea, who was exclaiming in the meantime:

"Dón't you come Bennin' me! The days o' that has gone by! An' who on earth are you now-a-days that a neighbor can't see you when he wants to? An' who are you to keep a bull as won't let people through a right-o'-way? I should like to know that, I should! Look here!" He held up the torn side of his coat and pointed to other damage about his clothes. "A fine thing this! Isn't it? To be man-handled like a sheaf o' straw, just because your neighbor has a prize bull, an' you don't bow an' scrape to him (Aaron)!"

My word for it, but things are coming to a nice pass on Foulness! Aren't they, now?"

From fiery denunciation he had changed his tone to satirical railing, and was now looking up at Aaron, as if each glance of his flashing black eyes was another nail in Aaron's coffin. Quite ordinarily Aaron replied:

"In the first place I don't know what you mean; and, in the second, it's quite true what Barbara says, I mustn't stand long in this cold wind. So will you come inside and let's hear what's the matter?"

"No, I'll not come inside! Not if there's never another door open to me in Foulness till the church opens for me when I'm dead! You called me a fool before everybody! I don't forget it, an' I never shall forget it! You, the 'great man,' the 'successful man!' An' now you turn a crazy bull loose in a meadow with a path through it! An' this is what I get!" Again he indicated his clothing, and added, heedless, as he had been all along, of Aaron's efforts to get in a remark or a question: "Lord God, man, who are you? What are you?"

"Look here, Ben——"

"Don't you Ben me, I tell you!"

"Very well, then, Wallasea——"

"An' I'm not one o' your workmen; so don't think it!"

Barbara had to turn away to hide the smile that struggled to her face, while Aaron answered, as before:

"What you mean about the bull in a meadow with a path through it, I don't know; but I know he was never put into one on my orders, nor to my knowledge. If it's been done, and you've been hurt—as you seem to show—I'm sorry, and will recompense you for what you've lost."

"Recompense, recompense! What'll recompense me for me run, for the upset I've had, for this awful ordeal I've gone through? Tell me that!"

"I've told you I'll recompense you, Mr. Wallasea, and I can't do more. Now go away home——"

"Who're you tellin' me to go home? More o' your orders?"

"I must go in now."

"Yes; I'm sure you must. You have been here too long," put in Barbara.

"And I'll see at once about the bull."

With that he walked in, followed closely by Barbara. The door was shut and Wallasea was left in the open porch, uttering a few more exclamations, one of which was that he knew the animal had been put there for the purpose of goring him. Then he went away, loudly declaring that he would "have the law on 'the great man,'" and that "he wouldn't be great much longer, for the Devil was already astride the ridge of his roof." But the most rankling thing in Wallasea's mind was the fact that his son had gone to sea because Roger had.

On making immediate inquiries Aaron found that the bull had, mistakenly, been put into another mea-

dow—as Wallasea had said—by a new man, whom Aaron had obtained from the mainland, he being unable to get closer at hand the additional help he needed. It was an unfortunate affair, for the worst possible capital was made out of it by Aaron's enemies, as both he and Barbara foresaw. Yet, because of certain circumstances, the new man was so little to blame really, that Aaron settled Wallasea's bill (a new suit of clothes and a five-pound note, for the latter would not accept a penny less) without the annoyance of feeling that he was paying for a fool's error, or for something that could have been easily averted.

It was another outcome of his success, of his being a marked man among his fellows, Aaron thought—another bead on the same string as the others, as he had again and again reflected during his confinement to the house; seeing how his idol of commercial prosperity had grown fat, while that other, the dearer one of the two, family and social peace and honor, had shrunk to the condition of one of the lean kine in Joseph's dream. Those three weeks of detention indoors—due largely to his foolhardy obstinacy in walking home after the mêlée—were to Aaron a purgatory wherein he went through and through all his misfortunes, etc., from Roger's taking to the sea down to this attack of the bull on Wallasea. Still he refused to sell the bull, as he had done when, in its young days, it had come near to doing Barbara some serious injury. He had taken to it as a calf, believing that it was destined for great things in its way. That

insight had been proved; the animal was now a fine sire, bringing money and reputation to his owner. Therefore, even when Barbara said earnestly, "He'll get you into serious trouble one day," Aaron heard, paid no heed, and kept his bull—incidentally thinking that it was one of the very few things he would hesitate to lose at her real desire.

However, all things have their periods of continuance; they pass, and give place to others. So the rancor against Aaron simmered down and remained there; it did not die out—years, probably a generation, would be required for that. The East Anglian mind is a slow thing in its changes, an apparently wooden but really a subtle one in expression; and Essex is possibly the most typical of this to-day. Aaron and Barbara came and went much as before; but they knew thoroughly that, except in the hearts of a very few of their neighbors, there was no friendliness around them, and they conducted themselves accordingly.

Then Roger came home again, his apprenticeship finished, his manhood reached—and he tall, dark, strong, still rather round-shouldered, slow in action, not overburdened with words, yet decidedly intelligent and cheerful generally. He heard of the trouble that had taken place, and quietly, casually, remarked:

"Well, I'm sorry—very sorry; but I'm glad I wasn't here."

"What for? Don't you think you might have been

a bit of help in it all?" his father asked, in some surprise and paternal injury.

"Oh, yes; I could have helped a little. But as I was on the other side of the world it can't be said that I brought it about at all, you see," answered Roger, in his usual tone of slight disinterestedness.

Yet there had been a touch of satisfaction in his tone, and the words were accompanied by a look that Aaron at once understood and was, in a sense, not sorry to recognize—not sorry because it proved that Roger could both see a point in his own favor, and had evidently developed some of the spirit and ability to put it forward. Aaron had always shown a certain degree of contemptuous impatience toward a docile man, oblivious to the fact that his commanding, rather than encouraging, up-bringing of Roger had tended entirely toward the making of docility.

On this occasion he returned his son's gaze for a moment, then laughed, and said: "No, you can't—that's a fact! Capital, well done! You got your own back there, anyway."

Thus the small, yet indicative, affair passed off. There was no "party," indoors or out, on this homecoming of Roger's. Those were matters for boyhood, youth and new experiences of an out-of-the-way nature. Now he was a man, with a man's work and life before him. So the few presents were for his father, Barbara, Margaret, and a couple of his oldest male friends.

For a week he fraternized with the young men

who had been his companions, more or less, when they were boys; and was not surprised to find that Elsie Newlands and Bob Churchend were engaged to be married. Then came an instance that proved how he was still, at the back of things, a prey to that slackness which his father had so often and so emphatically denounced years before. At the end of the week, according to previous arrangement, he went to London, spent a fortnight at a school of navigation, passed the Board of Trade's examination for a second mate's certificate, and returned home—there to tell his father, a few days later, that, after all he would "rather stay on the coast than go deep-watering."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Aaron, with some of the decided man's usual suspicion of what appeared to be a sudden change of mind.

"Well, it's merely this—if I go deep-watering, long voyages that is, I just get my six-pound-ten a month as second mate. But if I get a coasting master's ticket—which I can at once—and buy a small packet of some sort, and run her as master and owner, I shall be making better pay than a second mate's, and the profits of the trips as well."

"M'm, it sounds all right," Aaron said reflectively. "And if it is all right it's the better thing. But, of course, I don't know—I'm all in your hands in the matter. And I expect you'll want me to find the money for the vessel."

"Yes. I couldn't find it; and it wouldn't be worth while to go coasting just as a paid hand." At the same time Roger felt secretly that he would rather do that, and so be able to come home at frequent intervals, than go again on long voyages, whatever the prospects of the latter were. Had he been able to muster the necessary moral courage and decision he would have told his father there and then that he would prefer to stay at home and be a farmer rather than go to sea in any capacity. But he was still afraid, in a way, of that old half-genial, half-biting derision at his "never knowing his own mind"; and he would have been still more backward in saying that the real cause of his wishing to be nearer home was that new, but not yet emphatic, feeling about Barbara with which he last went to sea.

"And when did you come to this conclusion, then?" Aaron inquired, after a short silence.

"Oh! I've been thinking about it since I went to London."

"Does it mean you'll have to go again for another examination?"

"Yes."

"Another fortnight at school?"

"Perhaps."

"It means another week or two's expense, anyway?"

"Well, yes."

"Then why didn't you say so? And why didn't

you out with it before you sat for the other examination?"

"Because I wasn't sure of it," was Roger's answer, following some hesitation.

Aaron sat quite still, looking steadily at Roger's face, his eyes full of thought. The son knew this, instinctively and of old experience, and kept his gaze in another direction.

"What's made you change your mind like this?" Aaron asked presently.

"Oh, I don't know, hardly—been weighing it up, that's all—putting this and that together," was the reply. In his heart, however, Roger felt what the reason was; but he wanted to become more sure of himself in the matter. "It will pay better, that's the main thing," he added, rather lamely, and feeling mean at the half-lie.

Barbara came in, busy about something. Aaron's gaze was still fixed scrutinizingly on Roger as he said:

"It isn't because you're in love with Fanny Nazewick, then?"

"Oh, no! not I," came the ready and decided answer, and he looked at Barbara. She gave them both a casual glance, but said nothing.

"Because we used to think you were, you know, before you came home last time."

"I'm sorry you thought wrong, then—that is, if you wished it." Roger laughed slightly at the notion,

and added that "everybody knew how Fanny was throwing her cap at Dick Shelford."

So the change was settled on. Roger obtained a coasting-master's certificate. At his choice his father bought a pretty, little top-sail schooner, paid for her to be thoroughly fitted out, and gave the vessel, as she stood, to Roger, along with £100 as working capital; he to pay, at his own suggestion, two and a half percent. of his profits as interest on the outlay. Roger thought that he would have liked to rename the schooner *Barbara*; he, however, said nothing about the matter. As a compromise with himself, however, he had the vessel's name altered to *Barwood*, this being his own compound of the family "wood" and the first syllable of "Barbara," whereat both she and his father were pleased. Then, when he was going away to join his vessel for the first trip, and saying good-bye to Barbara—Aaron being at the door with the trap, ready to drive him to Shoebury station—he said, with a glint of that unusual fire in his eyes:

"I shan't be long from home at a spell now. I shall take a look in pretty often, and soon."

With that he went, Barbara saying she hoped so and wishing him good luck; she thinking that the light in his eyes and his more than commonly alert manner were due merely to the prospect conveyed in his words. That evening Elsie and Betty called, chiefly to gossip; and the former, on learning that Roger had just gone to join "*his ship*" (at which facts Barbara was naturally proud), remarked:

"He'll be bringing a fine wife home next time, then, if he doesn't take her on his ship."

"I don't think so," said Betty, uninterestedly.

"Oh, but I hope he will," Barbara interjected brightly. "But I hope most that she *will* be a fine one—because he's worth a good wife, if ever any man ever was."

Betty agreed and meant it; Elsie said: "Oh, he's all right—as far as one knows." But Barbara had her prideful illusions of Roger, and her heart would have ached long and severely to have known that he had married "a wrong one," and at the moment she was slightly conscious of a vague dislike to the idea of seeing him bring home a wife of any sort. As for him and her—to all who knew them they were as much brother and sister as two human beings could be, while she would have laughed sincerely at the suggestion of *her* becoming his wife—although it would have made her think deeply soon afterward.

But Roger's venture was not destined to be successful. That winter was more than ordinarily stormy, and his schooner suffered voyage after voyage, her repairs swallowing more than the profits. So that he became disheartened, striving and striving vainly to better his fortunes, and ashamed to go home, until the insatiable sea should allow him, or to go back with some degree of credit. Then summer came, and he picked up a little of the lost ground; yet freights were low, trade was bad. The winter found him unready to meet its demands, without further

monetary help from his father; and he wished, after all, that he had told Barbara why he wanted to be more at home, then stayed there, farming, or gone deep-watering again.

## CHAPTER X

"YOU'RE very quiet to-night, Barbara. What's gone amiss to-day?" asked Aaron.

A few minutes before this he had closed his account-books—thinking how well things would be financially but for Roger's losses—turned his windsor armchair from the table, lit a big-bowled pipe, and now sat smoking and looking at her.

"Oh, nothing," she replied slowly, after a pause, and kept steadily to her needlework, on the opposite side of the old-fashioned fireplace—this being the room that was used for meals.

"Don't tell me that, girl—because I know better. . . . I know you like a book, you know, Barbara. Now what is it, my girl?" he concluded, smilingly; but she was silent.

In spite of a certain touch of rather brusque authority, paternal in both words and manner, there was in the tone his usual deep sense of kindness when speaking to her, and something more than kindness in his gaze. He thrust out his feet toward the polished steel-topped fender, bringing the bright colors of his carpet slippers (which Barbara had worked for him during the previous winter) well into the glare of the fire and the light from the lamp on the table,

and added: "You may as well tell me. What is it?"

"Oh, not much—only Dick Shelford has asked me to be his wife," was Barbara's quiet answer, made to the accompanying click of her needle against the thimble.

"M'm, he has, indeed; has he? And when was this?" asked Aaron deliberately, after a short pause.

"Now—this evening, as I came back from the vicarage. I met him by the mill and he walked on with me."

Aaron looked more steadily at her than before, oblivious to the fact that her even demeanor and the lack of increasing color on her fine face were evidence enough that Shelford's offer had caused but little disturbance in her heart—much less, indeed, than the announcement had set moving in his own, although he showed no trace of it either on his strong, bearded face or by any change in his quiet manner. His keen, rather warm grey-blue eyes and the hidden grip on the pipe stem were the only indications of what he felt. In the former there was a deep, yet masterly tenderness, as he watched her drooped face and thought, passingly, on the neatness of her braided dark hair and the fullness of her figure that had grown, under his eyes, from the meagerness of a child's. But Barbara saw none of that telltale expression, nor had she any suspicion of its being there.

"And what said you to that, girl?" was his immediate question, wherein there was still no sign of the passion at his heart.

"Oh, well, I'm afraid I had to hurt his feelings——"

"Hurt his feelings, eh?" Aaron interrupted, now divining which way the event had turned, and experiencing an equivalent relief. "I don't think Dick Shelford's so easy hurt in that way—or any other. Seems to me he's pretty light in what he feels, else he wouldn't take everything easy as he does." Then he added, on seeing an expression of surprise and rather wounded pride pass over her face: "All the same, he must feel it a bit to lose the finest girl on Foulness."

Barbara colored slightly at the not altogether unusual compliment, saying: "I don't believe he's half so light as most people thing he is. There's a lot of good in him; and it's always painful to hurt anyone that isn't bad."

"Oh, that's right enough; and likely enough he's all right at the bottom; but he isn't the man for you, my girl."

After a pause, during which Barbara stitched on steadily, while Aaron smoked and gazed at her, then at the low ceiling and back at her, he said:

"Put that away, Barbara, and bring your stool over here, and read to me again. Seems as if 'twas months since you did any reading."

Obedient to the request, neither averse to the reading nor really desirous of it, and still in the same mood, she folded up her work, asking: "What shall I read, then?"

"Oh, why not go back to the Moor and his wife. I like to hear how he won her and killed that devil who got between 'em; there's something like fire at the back of it all—it gets a grip on you. Or that about Rosalind and the others in the forest—it's pretty an' seems to be so old English; and on night's like this it's as well to think it's summer, and all's fine again. I thought it would come on to blow, when I was riding along the sands just afore darkness set in."

He referred to the northeast half-gale that had increased since sundown, and was then shrieking its bitter way over the island, carrying with it, in imperceptible particles, an unmistakable sense of the North Sea that thundered on the low shore but little more than a mile away.

"Besides," he continued, with evident relish, "I like that chap Touchstone, he's so blamed human and clever with it all; he makes me laugh when I shouldn't do."

Barbara had put away her sewing and was going across to the old, glazed bookcase, where stood, secure from dust and insects, the volumes that had served Aaron's father and grandfather during the long winter nights of nearly a hundred years.

"Or you might read something from the Bible again—only them Bible tales are so short, they don't carry you far," he added.

"Well, which is it to be?" she asked, opening the door of the bookcase.

"Oh, make it the Moor—he's always good."

So Barbara returned with a big, well-thumbed copy of Shakespeare in large type and sat on a stool, as usual, by Aaron's side, between him and the corner of the fender, with the book on her lap. While she found "Othello," he attended to the fire, then returned to his chair, relit his pipe, and drew the lamp nearer to the edge of the table, in order that Barbara could see better.

She had reached the end of the first act, and was beginning to read the second, when Aaron said:

"There, that'll do to-night. We don't want to go into the tragedy of it just now; let's keep the beauty to think on. False wives and friends an' murdering husbands don't make the best of reading when you want to be happy. Do they?" And he stretched out his right hand from the chair-arm till it lay caressingly on her further shoulder. With the half-forgetfulness that had come into his mind concerning Dick Shelford, Aaron's mood had changed since he asked for "Othello" to be read.

"No," Barbara answered simply, closing the book and resting her forearms on its cover.

Outside the wind blew with wintery fierceness. The fire had burned rather low; but the cozy room was still warm and full of the sense of comfort.

"I'm glad you said no to Dick, Barbara. I mean I'm glad you could say no properly, say no an' mean it," he remarked presently.

"Are you? I thought you would be."

She was merely thinking that he would have been

sorry to lose her because of the years they had spent together; and she looked up at him, a faint smile playing around her fine eyes and mobile mouth, to see instantly that there was in his eyes a light which she could not fail to understand, though she had never before seen it in its present white-heat intensity. Down drooped her gaze at once to her folded hands, as a warm flush spread over her cheeks.

"Yes, my girl,—it would have broken my heart if you'd had a fancy for Dick, or for another man outside of here. . . . Because, you know, I've been waiting for you these years—waiting, an' waiting, an' waiting, till I thought many a time I should die of waiting. But I—" His voice was growing low and husky with feeling, and his words were coming with less readiness—he was so full of them. "Well, I wanted you to be a woman first, and know your own mind, an' not take me because you might think it was your duty." . . . Barbara was still silent. "P'r'aps it isn't much news to you, and p'r'aps it is. But, there, I've said it now, anyway."

His fingers closed more lovingly around her shoulder, drawing her quietly till she was pressed against the chair, and he leaned over her head, his pipe gripped unconsciously in the other hand.

"Will you, Barb'ra? Will you, my girl? It's all life to me—yes or no. We've been so much together, done so much for one another; it would be awful now if another man came between us. You will,—won't you?"

And changing his right hand from her shoulder to the further side of her face he drew up her head and kissed her lips, as she knew he had never done before. Passive, flushed crimson, strangely happy, yet ill-at-ease because of something like doubt that moved vaguely and faintly at the back of her thoughts, Barbara let her head remain against the arm of his chair; while his hand caressed her cheek with all the sense of possession, his head just over hers, and he breathing deeply, as he felt that he had now saved his treasure and gathered it to himself for life. And what if he was forty-four and she only twenty, he thought; he was strong, healthy, young in his own opinion, and good looking enough for his years. And, with every comfort at home, surely that was sufficient for a wife.

And Barbara—No, this was no news to her. Month by month, season by season, the girl had seen this coming, in a way, even since she was little more than fifteen—for Aaron's guidance in thought generally and the healthy life at the farm, together with the salt winds that blew pretty constantly over it, had developed her early in mind and body, making the one sane and clear, without eliminating a touch of its natural femininity, or in any sense rendering it too perfect for common, human, daily wear and tear; while the other had matured to such fine proportions as would, even with less facial attraction, have compelled a second look from well-nigh any man under the age of sixty. She had marked its growing,—at

first questioningly, doubtfully, divining its real meaning only by her mother-wit; then had dreaded that her reading of Aaron's bearing toward her might prove to be correct, as every young, maiden mind does when it is brought face-to-face with the natural result of accepting the barely returned love of a man whose age doubles that of the recipient.

But the slow roll of the seasons and the duties they brought; the daily work of the house and farm; her own increasing responsibility in the former, Aaron's trust in her efficient handling of things and his pride in her generally; his isolation from their neighbors, added to his uniform kindness, which never overstepped the limits of quiet, guiding, brotherly, if somewhat masterly, companionship, had allayed her tremors; and matters kept their even course, till at length Barbara had grown to look on the situation as natural, as having but the one proper issue, and on the idea that Aaron was as dear to her as any other man could be. The very slow growth of the matter and its peculiar conditions had sapped it of all glamour and fervor on her side, and this was, perhaps, accountable for that suggestion—it was no more—of doubt; it might have been the doubt itself.

With him—the prize was his, And what more could such a nature ask? There was no more to ask, no more to do—except “to be a man”; and that was to feel it all, know it all, and say as little as possible. To him, as to most of the men and women in the

drab life around him, to have plenty of words in times of stress meant a small stock of feeling.

By-and-bye he said, "I suppose we sha'n't want to make a long job of it, Barbara,—shall we?"

"No, I don't see there's any need of that," she answered, almost ordinarily; that wave of feeling and shyness having pretty well subsided, in her speculations as to what would be said by the scandal-mongers who had hinted that her position in the house was not what it ought to be.

"Christmas, I reckon, won't be too soon; and it's a merry time—just the time for a wedding."

"Oh, but that's *very* short—only two months and a half!"

Barbara honestly thought that this was hurrying the affair along; but more still did she consider how the neighbors would look on such haste. All the same, however, Aaron gained his point, as it fell to his lot on most occasions—not by weight of argument entirely, nor by actual force of character, and certainly not by overbearing any more than by wheedling; but by a happy blending of all these traits, rendered in a few words, all of which made up his personality. Thus the matter was settled, and Aaron kissed her again, this time to find it distinctly returned, and thereby to have his blood sent rioting through him afresh, and to know, deeper than ever, the sweets of possession.

Presently there was a sound of footfalls without. Aaron sat upright. Barbara took the book back to its

place on the glazed-in shelf, and Margaret entered with a tray containing bread, cheese, ale, etc.—their usual week-night supper. As Margaret set the things on the table, Aaron said casually to Barbara:

"By-the-bye, Roger's coming home again—coming to stop this time, for a spell at any rate."

"Oh!" And Barbara turned abruptly from the bookcase, startled out of her train of thought.

While Aaron talked she thought of Roger.

"Yes," Aaron concluded, "I called at the post office in Wakering this afternoon an' found a letter there from him. Says he's sick of coasting—it doesn't pay. So he's goin' to lay the schooner up in the Roach here, an' help me, same as I helped my father; and, as that's the case, I shall take over Churchend's eighty-odd acres, then there'll be plenty for both of us to do."

"But Dick talks of having them, you know," said Barbara, rather surprised, and momentarily forgetting that vague, sudden something that had made her turn so quickly at the announcement of Roger's home-coming.

"Yes; I'm aware he does. Dick mostly talks a season ahead of everything. I shall go to-morrow an' make a bid."

"He won't like you for it," was Barbara's comment, made rather more casually than as a warning, yet remembering the old animosity, which she knew to be only sleeping.

"Maybe not; but that won't matter, my girl. Dick

could have had the land when the crops were still on it; he didn't; he's made no offer for it now, so he can't say I've taken it from under his nose."

"Well, I hope trouble won't come out of it, that's all," said she, knowing that he was as unchangeable in resentment as in friendship, when once the flow of his feelings was turned aside.

There the matter was left; and Margaret said how glad she would be to have "the boy" home again, and she hoped he would "never go any more on that awful sea that wasn't fit for wild dogs to live on." During the remainder of the evening Barbara spoke but little, and Aaron ascribed her unusual quietude to what had passed between them. To her it had been an evening of happenings, and she had much to think about.

In a few days all the island knew of the coming wedding, because Barbara told Betty, when the latter called on the following day, and said nothing about keeping it quiet. Some said, "I told you so"; others declared that it was "high time"; while a few remarked that, "It was a bit of a pity—she was so young an' that," just as Betty thought, yet did not put into words. And one of Barbara's first congratulatory callers was Fanny, who boldly said everywhere that Barbara was doing the right and the best thing, and she maintained the same, even when she was laughingly reminded that her interest lay in the fact that Barbara's marriage would leave the course clearer to Dick Shelford.

## CHAPTER XI

It was on a morning-tide at the end of November when Roger came back. He proceeded at once to lay up his schooner on the island-side of the river. As he jumped ashore his father met him, having watched the vessel sail into the Crouch, then around the corner of the island and up the Roach. For a little while they talked on obvious matters, Roger being subdued in manner and unusually short of words. Abounding in physical health and strength, yet he was not strong enough of mind to look squarely at his partial failure, and be unaffected by what he thought others would say of it among themselves. He almost wished that he had not come home in this fashion. Aaron, somewhat knowing his sensitiveness on the point, bade him cheer up—there were better times in store, he declared, in burly sympathy that was meant to be rousing, but was not, then he left his son to the work in hand.

At noon Roger went to the farm for dinner, as arranged; after which, when Barbara was out of the room, his father told him of the coming marriage. Roger said but little. This news was the last on earth he would have expected to hear. Aaron put his silence down to his shame at this galling kind of return; and Roger got up and went back to the river-

bank, where he stood, looking at the sloop, and wondering whether to continue his work of dismantling her; or immediately to put her in sea-trim again, and sail away with the coming night to wherever the winds would blow him.

No, he decided presently—that would be a cowardly action, besides setting all the neighbors' tongues wagging and preventing him from ever seeing Barbara again. He had returned, and he would stay. Barbara could not know that she was anything more to him than a foster-sister, or she would not have promised to marry his father, unless—well, yes, she must love him, Roger thought; for she was not the sort of girl to wed with any man for any other reason. So, after all, there was no danger—he could keep himself in hand. It would be time enough for him to run away when he could no more control himself. Thus he resumed his work, finished the dismantling, put out the extra moorings, paid off his mate and the A.B. and the boy, then turned his mind to the task of learning to be his father's right hand.

Aaron had taken old Isack Churchend's eighty-five acres and Monkton barn—the house—on a long lease, with an option to purchase—to the passing annoyance of Dick Shelford; but Aaron cared little for that. His heart was now immovably set on this double project of increasing his stake on the island and of making two closely-connected homes—the old place for himself, Barbara, and the children that would come of the union; and a new one for Roger, his wife, and

their family (when he married, as he was sure to do by-and-bye) ; two homes that should wax fat and multiply and spread over the island, and in good time perhaps make all Foulness a "family property"—for fair purchase, of course. Aaron had no desire to take away any man's holdings, or anything else he had, against that man's wish. But no one could complain against honest buying.

They (his neighbors generally) had chaffed him on his initial successes in cattle and sheep-rearing and on his advanced system of treating the land ; then, stage-by-stage, envy had given the chaff a vinegary taste ; light words had fallen out of use (except between him and the three or four men who cared but little for the others and would still be on peaceful terms with "the successful man") ; dislike and sly, rural maliciousness had grown big and brave enough to show their heads ; isolation and bigoted rancor had been Aaron's portion from those who ought to have practised complete friendliness with him. But now—now he would let them see that right was always the victor ; that however much they trod truth to the ground it was bound to rise again. They (these envious neighbors) knew something of the wrench he had felt when Roger went to sea, and they were well-enough acquainted with him to know that the quarrel between him and Wallasea had hurt him sorely ; but now he would have son, friend, family-successor, and a greater business success than ever, all in one, in a way. He owed them no ill-will, was his further re-

flection; he hoped he was too much a Christian for that sort of thing. But, after all, there was a pleasure in proving that injustice had to go to the wall in the finish, and let the rightful man out on the top.

In these moods and arguments between himself and his circumstances and prospects, which were now almost daily, Aaron could have hugged Roger for returning home to take up farming. His winning Barbara had been the blessed reward for his long waiting. Now his son's action had put the master-stroke to it all. So Aaron went about his land, and on his errands to Wakering, Southend, and elsewhere, thanking Providence daily for these proofs of its favor. He was still proud to think that in all things so far he had been successful, the coveted good esteem of his fellows generally alone excepted. Therefore why should he not be so in this dearly-beloved double project? And so he went about, with his mind more or less full of the quotation, "And the house of Aaron shall fill the land."

Thus a few days passed, and Aaron began to let it be seen in the house that he intended to make the wedding a fine affair. There was to be nothing vulgar about it; everything must be good, tip-top—no cheapness or meanness in anything; and he made a special journey to London for the purpose of buying wine, whiskey, the bride's cake, etc.; nothing that was good enough could be had nearer than the metropolis. Then he gave Barbara six five-pound notes to spend on clothing. Her saying that one-half would be suffi-

cient was all to no use. He insisted that no garment was too good for her on this occasion; that she must pay not less than five pounds for the wedding dress; that he wanted her to lay in a two or three years' stock of the best, etc. As to her not liking to take so much money from him for such a purpose, "and all that sort of thing—fiddlesticks!" She had earned it, and more, by her devotions to his interests and home-comfort in the past.

Thus she, too, began to pay expensive and exciting visits to Southend, mostly accompanied by Betty Churchend, sometimes by Aaron; she and her purchases being the subject of much comment and some magnifying imagination by the islanders generally, and by Fanny Nazewick and a few more in particular. But it happened on one occasion that neither Aaron nor Betty could go with her; and, as someone must drive her to Shoebury station, Aaron told Roger that he had better go. When they reached the station Roger suggested that he should make the whole journey. Pleased at the proposal, Barbara assented readily. So he put up the trap at an inn, and they boarded the train together—Roger rather more wordless than he was usually, and Barbara full of talk and brighter than she had been in his private company since his return home. On their journey back to Shoebury, at the end of a short rhapsody on her part about the matching of ribbons and laces in her bridal dress, he looked at her and said:

"You're finding a lot of pleasure in this affair."

"Of course I am! Why shouldn't I?" replied she, mentally pulled up at his remark and scenting vaguely some hidden meaning.

"Yes. Why shouldn't you?" was his quiet comment, as he again glanced through the window of their compartment, in which they were the only passengers.

Barbara was gazing at the side of his face, as if she would there read more than his words had contained, which she had barely heard in the rattle of the train. Presently she broke the pause.

"You're very queer sometimes, you know, Roger, since you came home again," she said in a reflective yet rather reproving manner.

"Am I?"

"Yes. I believe there's something on your mind."

"A man has reason to have something on his mind when he comes home as I have."

"Well, yes; I suppose so," Barbara remarked, now with a touch of sadness in her tone, then changing to the practical again, "but everyone can't be successful in what they take up. And I don't see you should grieve so much about your failure at sea, now you're here and everything promises to go so well."

"You do think everything will go well, then?"

"Of course they will—if you only cheer up and let them. Doesn't everything go well that your father's concerned with, or nearly so?"

"Him? Yes." Then he suddenly looked at her again, adding in the same half-despondent manner,

"You are marrying him for love, I suppose, Barbara?"

"Well, what a thing to say! Certainly I am. I've loved him all my life—ever since I can remember." She almost concluded with "in a way"; but, instead, her ending was, "Who couldn't, if they only knew him properly?"

"Yes, he's very good, in most ways," Roger answered as before, and again fixed his gaze on the passing landscape and the vessels on the Thames beyond. There was so much that could be said, he felt; yet decency, charity, and other things forbade it all.

Silence marked most of the remainder of the journey, and Barbara's thoughts of the wedding arrangements were interrupted repeatedly by others concerning Roger and these rather cryptic remarks of his. At home, however, there were the bustle and talk of preparations to oust this puzzle from her mind; yet it persisted in coming back from time to time.

During these intervening days Aaron was too busy with the various details of the wedding, the amalgamation of the two holdings and all that appertained thereto, for him to take much heed of Roger's continued depression and shortness of words. But Barbara noticed it all, still attributing it to the same cause as Aaron did. Her greater intuition and feminine impressibility enabled her to understand and sympathize with the son, to an extent which the father could not reach. At the same time she was hardly the

bright though quiet girl that Roger had known her to be during the two previous spells at home; and he wondered at the change, unsatisfactorily searching his mind to discover a reason; for the idea that the coming marriage was at the bottom of it would not hold with him, his argument being that if Barbara's heart was on the match, she could not be other than radiantly happy.

And Barbara knew that she was quieter than usual —knew it, and tried, in Roger's presence to overcome it, but failed. In her own mind this lack of words and rather increasing preoccupation at times was in nowise connected with Roger's; nor was it due in the least to that faint something at the back of her mind, which nothing had suggested to her as doubt on the wisdom of her marrying Aaron. These things and their possible relation to other matters were never part of her thoughts; but this does not say that, all unaware to her there was a kind of psychic connection between them. Now and then, when this change forced itself into her reflections, she ascribed it to her certain knowledge that for two months past their neighbors had talked of her wedding-to-be, morning, noon, and night, by the fireside, on the land, at the inns and markets, and almost, if not quite, in the church. Nor was it altogether unguessed by Barbara that they linked her name with Roger's as was only natural; yet her thoughts on this point did not get so far as their supposition, i. e., "that, but for his born slackness, she might have fancied the son in-

stead of his father." As if, ran her meditations, she had not played and romped and tumbled with him all through their boy-and-girl life; and as if one could fall in love with and marry a man with whom one had been so familiar all those years. (It did not occur to Barbara that what she now looked on as obstacles, others saw as stepping-stones.) Why, there must be some romance, or fire, or something of that sort in every marriage, she considered; yet quite forgot that her own wedding was furnishing none of these to her—that it had been a too slow-growing expectation, with warm-hearted duty as its real foundation, for her to feel it as more than a predestined, although an exciting, occurrence.

Aaron—who would have laughed at the notion of Barbara being in love with Roger, and had never till recently thought seriously of his son's marriage—scarcely noticed her fits of preoccupation. There was so much coming and going to this place and that, so many things demanding his attention, that, in what little thought he gave the matter, he put it down naturally to her sense of the seriousness, and to the obviousness of the coming marriage.

So Christmas drew quite near, white under foot, leaden over head, and the island folk went shivering in the North Sea winds that whistled malignantly over their flat lands. And Roger was startled by his father suggesting—after Barbara had gone to bed, on the evening of his second journey with her to Southend

—that he should give away the bride. The son mumbled an evasive answer.

"I don't see why not," said Aaron, in a manner so hearty that it helped to shake Roger into a more lively consciousness. "And, besides, it would be so much better not being beholden to anybody outside ourselves."

"Well, to tell the truth, I think that would make it too much a family matter."

"Oh; that be bothered!"

"Another thing; I don't look old enough for the job. It will be a lot more like the real thing if you get one of your neighbors to do it."

Aaron tried to pooh-pooh away his son's objections; but, in a sense half-hearted, and putting his replies in a hesitating sort of manner, Roger held on, adding presently, with a weak smile that was intended to give meaning to what he knew was not true:

"It's a pity, for this reason, that you quarrelled so bitterly with your old friend Wallasea——"

"Not so fast, Roger—not so fast. It was the other way about, as you know quite well. Mr. Wallasea quarrelled with me, and you caused it; so be straight about it," Aaron interrupted with vigor, even while he winced slightly at the wound which time seemed to be unable to heal entirely. He knew that Roger had said this to turn the drift of their talk, not to get "one back home on him"; for whatever were his other faults of slackness, the son—as his father had often boasted quietly—had never been a user of back-

handers in any form. So Aaron returned again to the first argument, saying: "I don't see what on earth you can have against it properly—it isn't as if you could have any objections to the wedding—to Barbara and me marrying, I mean."

In an instant Roger became more alert, asking himself, in a kind of horror: "What if his father should guess his secret by this holding out against the proposition?" The thought was enough to pull him up shortly; for what an appalling upset there would be, should it leak out that he was in love with Barbara! —that, in fact, he had come to stay at home permanently more because of his love for her than of his failure on the coast. Aaron's words had nothing to do with this possible factor in the circumstances; his meaning was merely that Roger could not oppose the wedding except on personal grounds. And, as he was not likely to have any personal feeling in the matter, what could there be for him to object to? In his sudden arresting view of the situation Roger sat up, looking at the fire, and staggered mentally.

"Can you, now?" his father presently asked, with a vigorousness that jerked Roger into replying immediately:

"Oh no! of course not."

"I thought so. And as that settles it all right, and you're good enough to agree to my fancy, let's have another glass of whiskey—just to drink success to the 'fathering.' Then we'll go to bed."

Roger's reply had been to the query: Had he any

objections to the marriage? But Aaron had taken it as an answer to his request. Roger at once recognized this, saw the wisdom of saying no more on the subject, and drank to his own success in giving away the bride.

## CHAPTER XII

"It's a ghastly business—ghastly as hell with an innocent victim in the middle," said Roger to himself, as he walked upstairs, with no thought of his representing the centrepiece in his simile. And again and again, as the days went by, he could think of it only as "ghastly." And almost as often as this thought came to him he debated whether or not to quit the place suddenly, saying nothing to anyone, and leaving them all to think what they pleased. But the end was always the same: He might be "slow and sleepy," as most persons thought he was, yet he could not be cowardly; neither could he be so unkind to Barbara and his father as to run away at this late stage of the matter; he owed it both to them for their affection, etc., and to himself as a man, to bear it out at the end, no matter what he suffered by the way, and he would do so—even as he had borne the oppression of this growing love and the misery of his failure at sea since he began to work the schooner. So he went about as before, except in the presence of his father. Fearful still of the latter finding a peg whereon to hang some dawning suspicion of the truth, he took to playing the part of a more cheerful, interested son when talking with him. And, while Aaron

looked on it as a genuine change, finding it a reason for an increase in the breezy virility that had grown upon him since the beginning of preparations for the wedding, and in which there was always some obtuseness as to finer issues, Barbara saw it, noted that Roger purposely avoided her private company, and wondered more than ever.

So came Christmas day and the wedding. The snow was frozen hard, a cold sun shone in a clear sky, and a light, penetrating wind blew in from the North Sea. Anxious about the weather, Aaron was early astir, and ready to give a sovereign to the first person he met, because the day promised to be exceptionally fine. Of course Barbara was greeted with, "Happy is the bride the sun shines on," and smiled as a reply. Aaron—chief of the outdoor staff and monitor to the inside one—had made all the arrangements, down to the last detail.

When the time of departure arrived, the carriages (brought from Southend on the previous day) drove out from his own stables—Aaron would not have them come from The Dragon to fetch his party to church. There was Barbara fresh, sweet, and delightful in a simple creamy-hued frock, etc., relieved here and there with pale blue, both of which set off excellently her fine form and not unhandsome face. Then there were Fanny Nazewick and Betty Church-end in splendid blue, which had been insisted on by Fanny because it was her "favorite color and harmonized with her freckles," she all chatter, attentiveness

to details, vivacity and secret envy; while Betty—with her mind intermittently on the absent Fred—was dreamy, forgetful, yet bearing no animosity because blue did not suit her round, red face. There were Aaron's two nieces—on his first wife's side—Amabel, a big, fair beauty, all bounce and brightness; the other Lucinda, smaller, dark and demure. After almost losing sight of them for ten years, he had fetched them from their home up by Chelmsford. And, finally, four small girls from Barbara's Sunday-school class, all in delicate pink and carrying big bouquets of expensive flowers—dresses, ornaments, and everything being at Aaron's cost. In addition he had caused the other members of the bride's class to be similarly decked out, and arranged along the sides of the aisle to strew flowers at Barbara's feet as she went to the altar and returned—to the accompaniment of the organ and the full choir, to every member of which Aaron had promised five shillings, because of a rumor that some of the boys had been forbidden by their parents to attend and “sing for ‘the great man’s’ wedding to the girl he’s been saving up for himself.”

The announcement of the marriage had been a surprise to the island-folks, except to those wiseacres who had “seen it all along”; but now they had an even greater cause to open their eyes, when they saw Roger give away the bride. For some inherent reason there was a militant sense of the incongruous here. At Aaron's desire this whim of his had been kept

secret, not because he feared in any way to let it be known generally; but the notion pleased him at the time, and, knowing how it would set certain tongues wagging, also in a degree despising the owners of those tongues, he had decided to spring amazement upon them—without a thought on Barbara's part that the “giving” was in anywise unusual; to her mind the matter was a mere formality, and it made no difference who carried it out. To Roger it was the culmination of his life's tragedy. For what was failure in worldly affairs compared with this? Too sick at heart to respond clearly to the rector's question, “Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?” Roger bungled so hopelessly as to make some of the spectators say afterward that he and his father should have changed places for more than one reason, while later in the day even his father breezily chaffed him on his “nervousness” in this matter. However, all went well till the carriages were driving away from the church; then from the back of the throng—for nine-tenths of the islanders were there—came a few low shouts, such as: “Lord o' the Manor!” “Look at the great man!” “Shame on him!” etc. But on the whole there was geniality, accompanied by sufficient vocal approbation and the reiteration of “A merry Christmas!” to drown the unfavorable element—for the day was Christmas, and the occasion was a wedding.

All the same those “slings of the unsuccessful” were to Aaron as the fly in the ointment; and, gnaw-

ing quietly beneath his joviality, this remained, and was augmented in the house, where he looked around presently and missed some faces which he would have liked to be there. Truth to tell, although he had increased the gathering by raking in several half-forgotten relatives from the mainland, it was still too small to satisfy him; and, owing to the cleavage, for and against him, one-half of the company had come without the half it wanted there—such as Fanny Nazewick, who kept up her chatter, etc., yet felt all the time that this was the play without Hamlet, because Dick Shelford was not there. It was largely owing to this fact that Fanny, on meeting Barbara in a sort of back-water of the bustle, passed an obvious remark, then said:

"I can't think, you know, sometimes, why ever you married Mr. Rugwood."

"You can't what?" Barbara asked, too surprised to see that the comment was merely a piece of spitefulness.

"Well, the property was sure to come to Roger some day. Wasn't it?" was Fanny's rejoinder; whereat Barbara gave her a look in which there was more than reproach, then passed on.

Nor was Aaron pleased when, after the "breakfast" (really a midday dinner of Christmas and wedding fare), and all were moving about, talking, complimenting, drinking, smoking, quizzing, and asking pertinent questions of the unmarried ones—with Roger here and there trying to be bright and natural,

and making a "ghastly" failure of it, in his own eyes—elderly Churchend came up, gave him a surreptitious dig in the ribs, winked, smiled a smile in which there was a touch of whiskey, and half-whispered:

"Wanted a young wife, eh, Aaron?—sly fox—always successful. Takin' a leaf out o' Solomon's book, aye? Takin' the young to help you keep young." He chuckled, adding: "But don't you go an' follow him too far. There's the young men about here to think on, you know—'nless they're to take the old maids on the mainland. An', besides, some of us old codgers may like to play in the same suit; an' we haven't too many handsome young 'uns among us, like Barbara."

"Never mind, Robert—you keep to your muffins and spare-rib, and you'll be all right. Better for you than any wife," answered Aaron to the widower, whose daughter Betty kept house for him since her mother died, during the previous summer, after having "led Churchend a fine, lively sort o' dance all along." Aaron did not like any suggestion of Barbara being young and of his—well, not being young.

"That's all very well for you to warn others out o' the strawberry-bed when you're in it, an' the fruit's ripe," said the old man, remembering his reputation as a wit.

"Now, now, Robert," Aaron cautioned, as another neighbor joined them, and Aaron feared something might be said that would be too much of Rochford

cattle-market to suit his parlor. "You keep to your spare-rib."

"But I haven't got me spare-rib. Besides, isn't it written that a man shan't live be spare-rib alone, leastways, not by one?"

Laughing as the occasion required, Aaron moved away to attend to his guests, and some merriment followed. Then, in the afternoon, when the tide was well out, Aaron took Barbara to London, for a spell of Christmas pantomimes and theatres generally; while Roger stayed at home, in the daytime to wander about the fields, doing but little, and in the evenings to sit indoors, wondering whether to continue the farming or to go to sea again. When his father and Barbara returned he had made up his mind to follow the latter course; but another sight of her weakened him into remaining where he was.

Thus he kept to the ploughing, harrowing, sowing those flat lands over which the hard North Sea breathed its bitter winter breath, and flung its fine spray in the equinoctial gales—the old grey life that he had gone through as a boy, yet without the compensations which it had then given to him, and greyer now because of the secret in his heart—the secret that he was blindly, for all time, *in love with his father's wife*. This, now in these words, ran through his mind almost daily, keeping him well-nigh as quiet and short of words as he had been during the first few weeks after his return home. Again and again it haunted him to the point of running away from the

place; then came the old, weak argument against cowardice. He remembered his dislike of the sea, and fell to dwelling on Barbara, her charms, and his inability to break the unguessed power that she had over him.

## CHAPTER XIII

SPRING drew near; and what had been bare, brown fields were seriated with long, low rows of tender green where by-and-bye, if the weather continued to be good, there would be heavy crops of rich, red Essex wheat.

Then, in the breathing-time before the cutting of their excellent yield of hay (for monetary matters still prospered well with Rugwood House), Aaron began to put it to Roger that he should take to himself a wife, and occupy the house that had fallen to them with the eighty-odd acres, and was still tenanted by Churchend. Roger had not anticipated this dilemma; at first it put him into a corner out of which he saw no escape. He could find no loophole except in the excuse that he knew no woman with whom he cared to marry. But his father again reminded him of how he had appeared to be sweet on Fanny Nazewick during his apprenticeship, adding—rather heedless of her well-known liking for Dick Shelford:

"She's still single, and likely to remain so apparently; she's been brought up as a farmer's daughter should be, and she'll make a fine wife for any man who has to get his living out of the land. Besides, if she is a bit flighty in a way, she's as smart and

good looking as the next, wherever the next comes from."

"You forget her tongue," said Roger, in a casual manner, and, gazing over the growing crops (he and his father being then on a little rising ground), past the sky-silhouetted windmill and the old, tiled roofs around it, and out to sea. He was neither hurt nor annoyed at these persistent efforts to force him into marriage, all of which he knew to spring from his father's open and vigorous desire to spread the family and its possessions over the island.

"Oh, that be bothered! Many a woman's spiteful without meaning it; it's only their way of letting off steam, and doesn't matter, if you only look at it right," Aaron answered after a moment's pause, knowing that Fanny's generally acknowledged "touch o' vinegar" had rather cornered him.

In reply Roger could only say that it was "all off," and regain a semblance of quietude by promising to "rake round in his mind, and think the matter over." This was not at all satisfactory to Aaron, both for his "family" reason and because he had recently joined hands with the elder Nazewick in some farming matters. But he saw that he must accept the situation, in as far as it left the Nazewicks outside; yet the other part of the subject was of a more pressing nature. After a longer pause Aaron returned to the charge with—

"Then, there's Betty Churchend. She's got nobody tied to her apron strings that I know of; and

she's quiet enough for any man, if she is a bit dumpy. And they say she's a great hand in the kitchen and that."

"I know," was the disinterested rejoinder.

"Well, what's the matter with her?"

"Nothing, so far as I'm concerned."

"Then why not go in—as the door's open?"

"No, thank you."

"I see no reason why not."

"I do."

"What is it?"

"Betty doesn't want me, and I don't her."

"How do you know? Have you asked her?"

"No," said Roger in reply to the second question.

"Well, how do you know, then?" again came the query, in that fairly quiet, insistent manner which was so much of Aaron's temperament.

"Because Betty's in love with Fred Wallasea, and she's going to wait till he comes home."

"But nobody knows anything about him. They say he never writes."

"That's nothing to do with it. Betty was in love with him before he went; and she's one to stick there."

"You seem to know all about it," the father remarked, with a certain meaning and a side-glance at Roger, which the latter quite understood, and answered, this time convincingly:

"I know that much, anyway. Besides, I don't want her."

"M'm," was Aaron's meditative grunt, as his gaze moved from Roger to a stunted tree, without his seeing either the tree or hearing the thrush that perched there, singing his loudest and sweetest spring song—a song that Roger heard half inattentively, yet felt and recognized the subtle beauty and delight of it, at the back of those deep, miserable thoughts of his. Then Aaron began afresh to "rake round" further in his mind, till Roger said, resignedly but with some degree of force and bitterness:

"Don't worry about it, father. I'm the one that's concerned, and I shall get a wife soon enough for me."

This answer and the length and failure of the subject were enough to change Aaron's mood from the insistent to a genial desire to "rub it in" another way, hence he remarked:

"Well, then, to tell the truth, Roger, I'm blest if I know where you'll get one. I don't, upon my word. I don't mean it unkindly, and I hope you'll take it the same; but, although you're such a very good sort of a chap in your way—straight and kind and careful and all that sort of thing—and not bad-looking either, I'm blowed if I can fancy a girl taking a marrying-liking to you—at least not one with much spirit in her; and they all have it more or less, I notice, when it comes to marrying. Now I should have thought that Betty would just suit you—down to the ground, in fact. But, there, I suppose even she and girls like her see that you're not a marrying-man,

as they say. Well, well; I'm afraid I shall have to go courting for you," and Aaron laughed loudly at the idea.

Roger, however, did not mind such chaff, especially as it so largely accounted for his protracted solitary condition. So the matter came and went between them at irregular intervals.

Then Roger's secret began to leak out to Barbara. During the first few months in the year his manner had been more of an enigma to her than it was to his father; but she had not pondered on it so much as Aaron had, that was the difference between her nature and her husband's. While the latter had left possible solutions at hand, casting about for some sunken and far away cause of Roger's seemingly-fixed sorrow (for sorrow it must be, the father argued, in his anxiety to end it), Barbara, merged deeply in her new responsibilities and position in the life of the island, as the wife of its largest land-owner and farmer, saw, wondered somewhat, said a little to Aaron on the subject, then allowed it to go by daily—just as one of the settled things of life, therefore no more to be talked of than breakfast was, or market-day, or old Mr. Churchend's fondness for toasted muffins and roasted "spare-rib" of young pork. This, in fact, Barbara's openly honest heedlessness toward the matter—much as she was genuinely sorry at heart, when her attention chanced that way—was the reason that Aaron never thought of Barbara being, unknown to herself or not, possibly at the bottom of it all;

and, starting thus, his blindness continued to beyond the time when certain signs and happenings would otherwise have given him that peculiarity of insight which he had so often noticed in Othello.

But as the freshness wore away from Barbara's new circumstances, and life to her put on a more normal appearance generally, her mind was drawn again and again to Roger; to contrasting his former with his present self; to wondering, even as Aaron did, but far more to herself, what could be the cause of the prolonged melancholy; and, finally, by the way of his moodful attitudes toward herself, to some analysis of these, and on till she was pulled up by the staring blankness of a question that she hardly dared ask herself, even though she soon began to see that it was settling an unwonted quietude upon her. With the exception of those curious remarks of his in the train when returning from their first shopping journey to Southend, there was no particular phrase, glance, or action on which she could fasten as direct evidence for the disquieting idea that was taking possession of her mind, even to the extent of making Aaron ask her, on two or three occasions, why she was so "tongue-tied." And here it was, in these repeated reflections concerning Roger, that Barbara awoke to the fact that deep down in her heart there was far more sympathetic affection for Roger than her short married life had allowed to come to the surface. It seemed to her that she had been

very thoughtless about him during these few months, almost heedless of the trouble at his heart. Wililly-nilly she remembered many a brotherly act on his part in the years gone by—especially his courage and danger in getting her out of the Roach, when she fell in, just before he first went to sea; his giving her, at her wish, that big Indian silk shawl which he had brought for Fanny Nazewick; his resolute killing of the viper that poisoned her leg. The result being that, despite her fear, her sympathy grew and with it her kindly attentions increased.

Fearful of letting her guess the truth, Roger had, at times when no third person was present, been quite brusque in his bearing toward her; then, to put balm on the wounded conscience of his affection, this had given place to a deeper warmth in that considerate brotherliness which had ever marked his attitude in previous years. These and similar matters had set Barbara thinking; till, on one occasion, when they sat in the cozy dining-room (on the evening of a day when Aaron had gone at short notice to Southend on business and was kept back by the tide being up over the sands), Barbara chanced to say indiscreetly to Roger, as she looked up from her work:

"It's a pity you can't find the right one and get married, as your father wishes so much."

"The right one," he echoed at once, yet dejectedly, without moving his fixed gaze from the fire. "I've found her, but she's the wrong one."

"The *wrong* one? Then you *have* been married, as your father thinks sometimes, and got a bad one!"

"No, I haven't," Roger answered, as before, remembering how she had so often said and feared that "a good-for-nothing would get him."

"How do you know, then, that she's the wrong one?" Barbara smiled, with no thought of herself, as she added, "If you don't try her, you can't know."

"I mean she isn't for me," he broke in, with low-toned vehemence.

"Poor Roger," said she compassionately, thinking only of his sorrow. "Why, is she dead, or—"

"Oh, my God!" he cried, rising to his feet abruptly, with those primeval fires suddenly lighting up in his eyes, and giving her such a darting, soul-to-soul look as she had never before seen in them; yet Barbara knew the meaning of it in a moment, as every woman knows instantly the hurried glance of burning love. Then he added in the same manner: "Was ever man tried as I am?" And out he went, to walk the muddy lanes and fields in his misery, without a thought that he had given his secret into *her* keeping.

Meanwhile Barbara sat with hands in her lap, blaming herself for her share in this, glad in a way to know the truth, especially that he was not already married to a wrong one, yet tremulous at what it meant to her. Face-to-face with the half-dreaded truth that had gone mistily in front of her mind's eye during some weeks past, and now stood before her in sudden

and startling nakedness, she felt her pity go down to dangerous depths, even while she saw that in future she would have to watch her conduct with most exacting circumspection.

## CHAPTER XIV

WITH the exception of matters between Barbara and Roger, there was no change in affairs at Rugwood House for some weeks. Inferentially he felt, by-and-bye, that he had told her his secret, and went—in his own mind—shamefully in her presence for a few days. Then her pity found its way, without words, into his consciousness, telling him that his sorrow found a certain grace in her eyes. From that moment there was between them an understood, undefinable bond, wherein Barbara saw no disloyalty to her husband, for the plain and ample reason that—so far as she had examined the situation, Roger was to her as a brother in affliction. Had he not always been so altogether brotherly in his quiet, reserved way; so very opposite to her early idea of a lover; so apparently one who was rather indifferent toward women in the sense of sweetheart or wife? Of course, he had, she reflected; and now gave him so much pity that, had he known of it and its fullness, he would have known where some measure of joy lay.

Now there was to be some jollification at the farmstead in the early summer spell of semi-rest between haytime and harvest. Aaron had won two im-

portant prizes at an East Anglian cattle show; and he and Nazewick together had carried off another, the last being for a yearling bull that Nazewick had "picked up" as a calf, in a haphazard manner up Maldon-way, and Aaron (as Nazewick had counted on at the outset) had reared in his own particular manner, thus making the animal a party venture.

In addition, Barbara's birthday was at hand; so Aaron had decided to celebrate the two events by one gathering—rather against her wish; for, however much she tried to hide it from all in the house except Roger, and succeeded on the whole, her belief in the latter's love for her had become too oppressive to allow her to find real enjoyment in any such affair. It was not so much a case of Robin's being absent from the ball, or that the town or the world were dull because he was not there, as that his continual presence, the daily sight of his pain and dejection, added to her secret conviction that an honorable love for her was the cause of it all, that made Barbara feel how like a skeleton at its own feast she would be at any joyous celebration of hers. Not that she had now the least guilty suspicion of her sympathy—privately too deep for more than half of it to find outlet in looks and actions—or of that still more fatal motherliness which found an inadequate expression in those acts.

To Barbara's mind it was still merely a case of the man being Roger—her dear, good-hearted, clean-minded, upright though procrastinating school-companion and playfellow during all their early years.

True, she did think a little, in this connection, that if Roger had not gone away, but had remained at home, sharing in her daily life during those years when instinct makes the heart cast around to find itself a mate, matters might have been different. Beyond that point her thoughts would not go; there was nothing further to admit—only it was so pitiful, so distressing, to see him suffering thus from day to day and be unable to, in a way prevented by circumstances from, saying a word that might act as some balm to the wound he bore. But, in her desire to be the “ministering angel” that stands every ready at the altar of duty in every good woman, Barbara did not then think that her intended balm might have been as oil on the flames.

This was Barbara’s attitude toward “the little celebration,” as Aaron called it, in his exuberance of feeling and preparations; for if there was one thing, more than success and the esteem of those around him, that Aaron liked, that something else was to be the host of a gathering. Any reasonable excuse was sufficient ground for such an affair. But to be quite all that he desired it had to be merry, decorous, at his own house and graced by a fair quantity of femininity pleasant in manner and appearance. The present occasion was to take the form of a supper and a dance (his enemies derisively styled it “a ball”) in his big barn, which he had caused to be suitably floored and otherwise temporarily put in order for that purpose.

When the day of the affair arrived and Aaron returned in the afternoon from Shoebury, Barbara and Roger found that the guests were to be augmented by the latter's two cousins, who had been at the wedding. Saying nothing at home, by way of a joke, Aaron had invited them specially, with the secret hope that one of them would arouse some permanent interest in Roger.

Barbara was rather put out by this action; she felt that, as head of the domestic arrangements in the house, Aaron had not shown her a proper amount of consideration. Piqued out of her usual geniality and readiness to fall in with changes of circumstances (two characteristics that had endeared her to most persons since the end of her childhood), she complained rather forcibly to Aaron, when the young women had gone upstairs. In addition Barbara knew intuitively, all the time, for what real purpose he had brought them there; and deep down in her heart she felt a curious sort of pleasure, in which there was a sense of both pain and shame, that his efforts would be fruitless. But what was a complaint of that nature against his breezy joviality—and a merry gathering of his own to take place within a few hours!

Thus Aaron only laughed at Barbara's assertions that he ought to have given her notice of his niece's coming, and strode off to ascertain if all went well in the barn, leaving his wife to attend to Lucinda—the dark, quiet, younger girl with eyes like Roger's, and whom Barbara liked; and Amabel—the fair, loqua-

cious hoyden, about twenty years of age, with a profusion of wavy hair, an unceasing flow of words, and whose high spirits were generally full of common sense. Barbara had learned to know them fairly well at Christmas; but she was not the one to let them see that they were scarcely welcome. She had no blame in her thoughts for them, especially for Lucinda; yet there was no burking the fact that, in the depths of her feminine nature, there was a small, passing yet distinct resentment toward her husband for having taken this domestic liberty, against which she would ordinarily have said nothing. At the same time, if Barbara had been pressed to say which annoyed her the more, the "liberty" or this forced effort to find Roger a wife, she would have found the question hard indeed to answer.

Then night came, and all began to go merrily in the barn, which was lit by great candles stuck in some old iron-sockets that Aaron had picked up in a South-end lumber-store, and by all the stable-lanterns that he, Churchend, the Nazewicks, and a few other guests had been able to rake together. And if the lighting was more picturesque than brilliant, it did, at least, serve by its shadows to hide many a blush which a greater glare would have shown up in tell-tale fashion. Just as it was at his wedding, there were some missing faces which Aaron would have liked to see around him; but time was dulling that disappointment and turning it into the settled vexation that was meant

by those neighbors who spoke of him as "a blessin' if he loves you, but a curse if he hates you."

Still, if the company was short of a few estranged acquaintances and quondom friends, it was merry enough to please even his robustious taste. Had it not been, he would have made it so; for he was here, there and everywhere, inviting the energetic to further exertions, chaffing the shy and the lukewarm into jerks of palpitating delight, awkward movements, crimsoned faces and sudden withdrawals. Nearly all the time he took turns with any disengaged guests of the opposite sex whom he could find, young or otherwise, comely or not, dancers or lingerers, eager or retiring—it was all the same, they had to go; and, if one did not keep step, he just picked her up, swung her around with him once or twice, then set her down and gave her a fresh start. There seemed to be no end to his strength, bonhomie and burly vivacity; and if he had a favorite, she was dark-eyed Lucinda. He did not attempt to dance with Barbara till after supper.

To the pianist and the two fiddlers he allowed no rest; it was dance after dance, with a change in kind every time, till waltz, polka, sets, jig, reel, and every other movement known to any of the company or to the musicians had been tried in rapid succession, and was then repeated without order. It was an orgie of mazy turns, the grating of leather and even nails on an ordinary floor, highly-colored frocks and gay ribbons, striped trousers and flowered and spotted waistcoats, large flowers in buttonholes, red hands

and redder cheeks, excited eyes in demure faces, and, now and then, in a spin the full length of a sparse calf or a well-shaped one—all till breath was at a high premium everywhere, wet handkerchiefs were common, and the big double doors at the side of the barn had to be thrown outward, letting in a refreshing breeze that made the huge candles flicker against the black walls, and caught the light dresses rather too unruly, as their owners were whirled across the doorway. It was one of these chance exhibitions of fine limbs and under-drapery that set light to a kind of tow, which circumstances presently blew into a flaming condition.

Amabel had come to the dance in what she considered to be the only proper style for a handsome niece of the great landowner and host. Her fair, ample charms were partially covered by a wine-colored dress of some gauzy material and creamy decorations; in her hair there were two red roses; at her waist a big *Karl Frau Druski* and a dangling, deep-blue fan on a buff-ribbon, and she wore blue shoes and slightly pinky stockings. (The last item in the catalogue is compulsory, in order to give point to what happened.) Dick Shelford was there, in part because Fanny Nazewick had pressed Barbara to ask Aaron to invite him, partially because his easy-going temperament had already enabled him sufficiently to forget (as both Barbara and Aaron knew) that she had refused to be his wife, and in part because it did not run in Dick's blood to decline any invitation to a

merry-making. It was said of him that he would have lost an acre rather than miss a good dance *anywhere*, and that "for a tip-top one with plenty of beauties about he'd ha'e sold his next crops."

However, he was there, and from the first his attentions had all been for Amabel—and not in the least unsuccessfully. Dick was a well-set-up, good-looking fellow, with a ruddy face, a big, darkish-red moustache and an easy tongue. Excellent to the eye, Amabel knew him only as a farmer of freehold acres, a heart of apparently the same legal description; and, in for the best of the show herself, it was not in her to do other than to make pleasure while the candles flared and the music rang. Truth to tell, so far they were considerably the finest-looking couple that had taken the floor; they seemed to know it, and to flaunt their advantage and delight—to the secret spite of Fanny, and to the chagrin of certain other young men whose right arms were eager to encircle the wine-colored frock, and were aching with the weight of less desired burdens. Then, while Fanny stood by the open doors (unwisely catching the cool wind on her rather skimpy back, and talking tartly to Betty, who did not dance, and to Betty's brother Bob and his wife, Elsie—these two having been married at Easter) along came "the flagrant pair," as old Church-end had already dubbed them. The dance was a waltz, which the pianist was playing at time-and-a-half, after the fashion of the East End "flings" to which he had been accustomed in Southend. Dick and Amabel,

in fine show style, came up near the group by the opening in the black wall. He, being first to feel the breeze, charitably thought it would be wise to hurry his partner across it, lest too much of it through thin garments should set up a chill. So around he swung her, athwart the wind that caught the vinous frock and something else, turning them back and giving a more than sufficient glimpse of flesh-colored hose, and limbs that instantly sent Fanny's brown freckles red with envy. Hardly had the rare sight disappeared, when about turned Fanny, her smallish, grey eyes dilating, and she saying with bated breath:

"My gracious! Did you see it?"

"See what?" asked her brother Harry, in amused indifference.

"What? Why, you don't want telling what!"

"A pair of fine legs? Tut, what's amiss with 'em?"

"Legs! yes, and *nothing* on 'em!" was Fanny's half-whispered, wholly horrified exclamation.

"Oh; I don't think that, Fanny," said Elsie, imperturbably, as though both the exhibition and the imputation were of no concern.

"I'm *sure* of it!—I'm *sure* of it! You never saw stockings of that color!"

"Yes, hundreds of 'em."

"Where!"

"On the beach at Southend," answered Harry, in the same manner and low tone.

"And what of the panto's—plenty there, an' fine uns, too," Bob remarked.

"I don't think *you've* any call to talk about such things. *You're* a married man," put in Elsie with some asperity.

"I don't care what *any* of you say—she's come here dancing with *bare legs*, and I say it's a burning shame, and I shall *tell* Barbara," cried Fanny, still in a semi-whisper.

"I wouldn't, if I were you—not yet, *anyway*," observed Betty quietly.

"What for?"

"Because they mightn't be bare legs, and where would you be then?"

"I'm *sure* they are! Think I don't know bare flesh when I see it?"

"Now, Fan', now, Fan'—don't shame the family yet," Harry interrupted lightly, with a wink at the others.

"Well, *you* see, when she comes round again!" indignantly replied Fanny, without thinking of any secondary meaning in her words.

"That's just what I'm waiting for, and I'll bet Bob here is looking for the same little treat," her brother rejoined.

"Shame!"

"Bob, you come along here—*come along*."

And Elsie's willowy figure half-led, half-accompanied her husband's rather meagre breadth and smiling face out of the gusty doorway. Fanny and Betty

turned aside, leaving Harry and a few others waiting and watching surreptitiously. But before "the flagrant pair" came round again Aaron shouted "Supper!" and began to add some further invitation, which was not needed; for the music had already stopped, the heated dancers were at a standstill or breaking up, and Fanny was looking for someone to whom she could impart her disquieting revelation.

## CHAPTER XV

If the first half of the dance had been a lively affair, it was no less a merry party that trooped across in the semi-darkness of that starlit night late in May, to fill itself with whatever of the good things it could lay hands on in the house, where everybody ranged from parlor to kitchen and generally over the ground-floor, wherever there was a table spread—to the frequent greetings and other remarks of Margaret's parrot. But Fanny thought more of what she wished to say than of what she had to eat. While her brother, Betty, Bob, Elsie, and others who had witnessed the display, thought no more of the incident than that it was pleasing or embarrassing, according to individual points of view, Fanny was searching out whoever she could find of her own sex that were likely to give credence to her tale. Others might flout the idea "that any decent girl would come there dancing with bare legs"; yet Fanny had taken so strong a dislike to her rival that she honestly believed all she said half-secretly here and there in corners. She did not, however, go to Barbara with any assertion of the scandal; Fanny was too wise in her degree for that, knowing that Barbara would both disbelieve it off-hand, and would forbid her to say any more about it on those

premises. But when they met, in a moment of quietude toward the end of the stand-up supper, she could not avoid saying archly:

"What a handsome niece you have in Amabel Rugwood! And how she dances! Doesn't she?"

"Yes," answered Barbara to the question, and added genuinely, "I'm sorry she so monopolized Dick. But why don't you go in and get your share, instead of standing about so? I should dance my feet off with someone, if I were you. Get hold of Roger, or Ben Newlands, or any young man, and dance away."

"Oh, I don't mind, dear. He'll be sorry for it tomorrow."

"I hope he will—he ought to."

"But, I say," Fanny lowered her voice to a semi-whisper and put on a mysterious look, "has she any stockings on?"

"Stockings on?" echoed Barbara, aghast, knitting her brows, and by no means in Fanny's low tone. "What nonsense!" Fanny explained, simply, what she and others had seen, without a word of declaration as to her belief. "Ridiculous!" said Barbara. "Of course she has. I own that she ought not to wear flesh-colored things like that, in a place like this especially. But to think she hasn't any on—well, I call that shameful! Some of you must want something to make a scandal of," and she moved away indignantly, leaving Fanny to continue her delectable gossip.

When the company had gathered again in the barn

it happened that Aaron—after suggesting to Roger in a governing manner that he should dance at once with Lucinda—took Amabel for his partner and went away in a gallop. For some little time the floor was not half so covered with gyrating couples as it had been, and the most of those who stood around watching—with Dick among them—were looking for proof of Fanny's assertion, so much had the scandal spread; with the result that soon opinions were divided between stockings and no stockings. In the meantime Roger had not paired with Lucinda; she had become Harry Nazewick's partner, and Roger had found himself presently standing by Barbara.

"Why don't you dance?" she asked, her voice half-drowned by the hubbub.

"Oh, I don't care to. It's all a farce to me."

"Don't be so silly, Roger. You must shake it off—at a time like this, anyway," and she gave him a quick glance that he understood, as he did the meaning of "shake it off."

"Wish to heaven I could," was his dejected answer.

"I don't think you've danced to-night. Have you?"

"No, only once."

"Well, dance again. You make me miserable to see you so down-hearted."

"I'm sorry; but—I'll dance with you," he added abruptly, and gave her an unusually rapid look.

"Come on, then," replied she, as quickly, showing a trait of her old self.

And, without a thought on her part other than of

joining in the general merriment and giving him some pleasure, away they went. The measure had just changed to a waltz, and from the depths of his misery Roger was at once lifted into a heaven of delight. During all those months of hopeless longing, following a year of alternating hunger and doubt, he had not touched her more than a handshake at parting.

Now Barbara knew for an undoubtable certainty that his heart was burning for her, so tight and feverish was his hold on her, so intense was his look when it met hers. Very quickly the motion to him became largely mechanical, yet he guided her aright among the other couples. It seemed to Barbara, as she glanced at him now and then, seeing those rare primeval fires in his eyes, that his face had become positively handsome under the joy that stirred his blood as nothing in life had done till then. Two or three times she was rather afraid that he would forget himself, so deeply was he lost in the delight of holding her to him. As this thought ran through her mind she was sorry at her daring in taking him as a partner, blaming herself for being too foolhardy, and thinking what an awful upset there would be if Roger were to kiss her suddenly. But the dance ended without public disaster, though not without some burning embarrassment to them.

As the music crashed to its finale, she and Roger, together with two or three other couples, went whirling into the open double doorway, owing to a group having moved into their way, as the music

ceased. Before they could pull up they were out in the darkness, beyond the others, Roger holding to her to prevent her falling on the rough ground. Then, in an instant, he made to kiss her. Intuitively Barbara knew what was coming and jerked her head away, with the result that his kiss fell on the side of her neck. In the next moment she was out of his grasp, flashing looks around to ascertain if the action had been seen; it had not, apparently, and she went into the barn again, her face crimson at the touch of his lips, then fading as suddenly, she angry in a way yet perhaps more sorrowful than annoyed; while he lingered a few minutes outside, regaining his normal quietude of manner, and blaming himself for the rash act of a passionate fool.

Hardly had Barbara reentered when, in passing a little knot of gossips, she heard the word "stockings," gave them a sharp, reproving look, and walked on to where her husband was forming parties for quadrilles, to whisper to him that Amabel was "getting herself talked about."

"What for?" he asked, thinking that the charge would concern his niece's continual dancing with Dick Shelford.

"Because she's wearing flesh-colored stockings. Some of them think she hasn't any on."

"Fiddlesticks!" was his answer, half-incensed, but determined not to give way to anger. "This is a night of pleasure, and I'm going to enjoy myself up to the end. Don't take any notice. Bother it all,

some of 'em would talk about their grandmothers' stay-laces if they only saw a peep of 'em! Come and join this set with me."

Barbara did as she was bidden, feeling deeply annoyed with Amabel for setting their neighbors' tongues wagging in such a manner. Her thoughts were not on the dance. The pleasure of the evening was gone for her. Reflecting that when Aaron arrived with the girls, she had felt a curious sort of intuitive assurance that trouble would come out of this "joke" of his, she now saw that the upshot of Amabel's stockings and her carrying-on with Dick was duty-bound to bring heart-burnings, if no worse, to Aaron and herself—Fanny's spleen would see to that, and Barbara knew it, for she had never previously seen her quondom friend so bitterly moved. In the midst of all this her thoughts would revert willy-nilly to Roger and that sudden flaming-up of the love which she knew was hers, till intermittently her cheeks burned again as they had done in the darkness beyond the doorway; and she faltered, made mistakes in changing partners, pulled herself up several times with a mental jerk, and finally caused Aaron to look at her in some questioning wonderment—his sharp-witted, self-possessed Barbara preoccupied and making blunders!

Aaron was not sorry, and Barbara was glad, when the dance changed—enabling her to wander around and check "that silly scandal"; while he found time and occasion for the recuperation of his dwindling

high spirits and good humor. Truth to tell, this whisper of scandal—coming now, when the old animosity and isolation appeared to be dying out—had rather upset him. He knew what his neighbors were for hot gossip on any human failing, and he could almost have boxed Amabel's ears with one hand, while with the other he would have liked to trounce these lovers of garbage.

However, there presently came what had been arranged by him to be the last dance of the night; it was a waltz that he had requested Barbara to keep for him. Aaron could waltz, and he was aware of the fact. More, he was determined that this should be *his* dance, his and Barbara's, with only the best of the waltzers on the floor—a condition which he laughingly put upon them all when announcing that it was the final measure. He blew his whistle, and away they swung—he now dignified yet smiling and joyous again, upright as a stalwart of twenty-five, with pride on his face, a masterliness in his movements, holding his well-built young wife as most men would have held a slim girl, proud of her to overflowing, the master of the ceremonies and the host in one. And Barbara was not much behind him in some of his thoughts—he was her husband, all-in-all the finest man of them all, the most desirable on all counts except years. Hence why should she not be proud of him, of their place among their fellows, of their mutual intrinsic worth? Nor did vanity of it all disturb her, any more than it entered into Aaron's plea-

sure; yet Barbara could not altogether keep out recurring thoughts of the scandal which she knew would spread from this night, nor of that hot kiss of Roger's.

When the waltz was finished, there were cries for a last general dance. Aaron readily and good-naturedly agreed—he had enjoyed his own show thoroughly. A hop was chosen, and went boisterously till the host shouted, "One o'clock! It's time now, I think, to wind up!"

At this there was a common movement to the house where Barbara had already gone in order to see that all was prepared for those guests who were inclined to "have a mouthful" before starting home. When the bustle of departure was subsiding; when the hurrying in and out—some with their last "mouthfuls" still going—for forgotten wraps, forgotten good-nights, final thanks to host and hostess for a "jolly good time," etc., were nearly over, Fanny appeared ready to depart and gazing about as if in search of someone.

"What have you lost, Fanny?" Aaron called as he helped the school-mistress into her jacket.

"Dick," she said, half-absently, or her answer would have been couched in a different manner. Dick had brought her to the dance, and of late it had seemed as if they would soon be announced as an engaged couple.

Aaron laughed and remarked genially: "I'm afraid you lost him some time ago. Didn't you?"

"Don't be unfeeling!" Barbara admonished in a

low tone at his elbow, knowing how sensitive Fanny was on the subject of Dick, yet thinking that she "deserved something" for her scandal-mongering.

Fanny looked at Aaron in surprise, a little evident pain and some preoccupation. It was not common of him to throw at any girl or woman a remark that suggested jeering irony; this fact and the situation to Fanny had caused her unaccustomed look and bearing, whereas at another time her answer would have been quick, and even more pointed in its nature than his was. Aaron's temporary density was over; he saw his mistake, warmly said he had meant no harm, was really sorry, and asked generally if anyone had seen Dick recently.

"Yes. I saw him and Miss Rugwood come out of the barn, when you and Barbara began your great dance," Elsie replied, quite casually, as she stood by Bob at the other side of the room, with a half-emptied glass of port in one hand, a damaged sandwich in the other, and imperturbably feeling glad at having got in this quiet rap at his "great show off." For Elsie's "vinegar," slim like herself, always lay under her words, never in her tone or manner.

There was a moment's complete silence, as if Elsie's plain statement of an ordinary action had contained some startling dénouement. Then two other guests called the same to mind. Everyone was sure that he or she had seen neither Dick nor Amabel since then. Barbara whispered to Aaron, "I told you you shouldn't have brought her here." He felt the pin-

prick, looked at Roger and bade him "slip round and see where Dick was"; but, suddenly realizing the delicacy of the situation there and the indelicacy of what might come out of Roger's search, he added, as his son was leisurely leaving the room:

"Never mind, Roger. Look here, Fanny, *I'll* take you home. If Dick brought you here and isn't man enough to finish his work—then I'll do it for him, especially when there's a pretty girl like you in the case."

He was moving away to carry out his intention when Barbara said: "I don't suppose Fanny wants you to trouble yourself at this time in the morning, when she can go along with Elsie and Bob."

The Churchends could, by a little detour, pass her gate. (Her father and mother had gone home after supper, and Harry was away on the mainland.) But Aaron went for his hat and coat, all the same.

Knowing intuitively what Barbara meant, and having no heart at the moment to prolong the strained, unpleasant feeling, which everyone knew to have crept into the conversation and its atmosphere, Fanny answered: "No; I don't want him to see me home." But she had no desire to accompany Elsie and Bob, whose practical care of number one and selfishness toward most things outside themselves made Fanny know that she would get small sympathy at their hands on the way.

"You don't mind, do you?" Barbara asked of Elsie, who was replying in her usual placid it-doesn't-matter-

to-me manner, when Lucinda entered and said, in some mild surprise, from near the doorway:

"Aunt, Amabel's hat and jacket and things are gone."

It was as if the air had been charged at that moment with electricity. The half-dozen lingering guests and the members of the household were instantly alert. For what else could this mean than what they all thought it meant? Lucinda alone, perhaps, excepted. They looked from one to the other, sharply for the most part, staggered for the remainder, everyone eager to say what was on his or her tongue, yet all of them afraid to be the first to suggest the obvious solution. Momentarily flushed by being addressed as "Aunt" from the mouth of one who was only two years younger than herself, Barbara was on the point of replying, when along the short passage from the kitchen came the parrot's sharp screech of, "Stockings!" which she had learned at supper-time by a group standing under her cage and often repeating the word.

Immediately the tension was relieved. The men smiled. Elsie and two more women were amused inwardly.

"Are you sure?" Barbara asked of Lucinda.

"Yes. I can't see any of her things, except——"

"What on earth's the matter with that bird? This is twice I've heard it say the silly word!" Aaron testily remarked to nobody, brushing past Lucinda, as he re-entered, in a light overcoat, his hat on, and a stick in

his hand. Polly's interposition had annoyed him, and everyone felt there was more to happen in that way.

For reply Barbara said, looking straight at his face: "Amabel is gone."

All who were not directly concerned stared at either him, Fanny, Barbara, or Lucinda, each one according to his or her personal view of the situation. Imperfectly hearing what his wife had said, and paying no heed to what he had heard, Aaron went toward Fanny, saying in a changed tone:

"Are you ready?"

"Did you hear me?" Barbara inquired in a manner that pulled him around, face in her direction.

"Hear what?" he asked.

"That Amabel has gone."

"*Gone?* Gone where? What do you mean?"

"Her clothes are gone out of their room, Lucinda says; and she hasn't been seen since the last waltz."

"An hour and a half ago," put in Roger, with an effort to throw off the persistent effect of the kiss, and to be naturally one of the group.

"And the tide's down—just time to take the sands," was Bob's quiet contribution, as he glanced at the clock; then he turned to Elsie and muttered: "It's the stockings. They finished the job."

At the same moment Aaron said sharply: "What?"

"Nor has Dick Shelford, you hear," added Barbara, heedless of Roger's remark and of his father's query, and speaking in a quiet, significant manner.

"What, gone together . . . from my house!" he cried, passion momentarily flashing in his eyes; and there were those present who said afterward that they would never forget the look and tone which accompanied, "my house." Then, with a quick change of manner, etc., he added: "But this is nonsense! Sit down a minute or two, Fanny, I'll soon see if he isn't about. Barbara, you run upstairs and make sure of things there. Roger, come with me." And he made for the front door, adding: "I'll bet they're wandering about here somewhere, like a pair of mooney donkeys!"

Roger followed him. The door closed behind them, and Bob was just heard to say casually:

"I don't know what you'd bet; but I'd like to take your odds."

Barbara went upstairs, followed by Lucinda, and the others sat down again. Presently she returned and corroborated the news to the waiting guests, all of whom, except Fanny and Elsie, were showing signs of tired sleepiness—so much had they taken the situation for granted; while Elsie's temperament was much like her appearance, fine and long-lasting in spite of certain outward softness in the presentment physically. A few remarks were exchanged. Polly interrupted again with, "Stockings!" and Margaret was heard, gently chiding her, and telling her that she was not to say "Stockings"; whereat she cried again, "Stockings!" Then Aaron and Roger came back, to learn from Lucinda that her sister had taken her "week-

end" bag, and left her own (Amabel's) trunk behind. This was Aaron's "clencher." He sat on a chair, saying no more till all were gone, and Barbara—pained at his taking the affair so much to heart, trying to cheer him up, and sorry that she had been rather "short" with him over it all—asked if he was not going to bed.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE following day proved that the elopement was all too true for the interests of Fanny and Aaron. Telegrams, then letters, came from the runaways, saying that they had gone to London and would be married before they returned to Foulness. From Rugwood House they had walked to Dick's home, he carrying the bag which she had smuggled hurriedly out of the house. Then he had driven her, in his own trap, to Southend, whence they had proceeded to the metropolis by a workmen's early train. But they gave no address; so no one could go after them, or interfere with their plans.

For once Fanny's more tart than fully-meant remarks were forgotten. She went about rather wordlessly, asking no commiseration, with no blame for Dick, and appreciating the sympathy of Betty and Barbara; which the latter gave headily enough, under the conviction that Fanny had been punished more than sufficiently for the scandal she had spread. Neither did Aaron say much on the subject. He wrote at once to Amabel's fancified mother—who had given her daughters a string of names each, went to London regularly every Wednesday to see a “musical comedy” (and often witnessed the same one ten times), but

"abhorred plays." That lady paid Aaron a hurried visit, and some uncomplimentary remarks on the class of persons who frequented his "gatherings"; then she hastened home again—after a brief survey of the Shelford homestead and acres—taking Lucinda with her, and leaving her brother-in-law to some sad cogitations on the waywardness of many things in life, including human fancy. It was almost a wonder that he did not blame Roger, in a way, for this trouble; for the latter *was there*, as both he and Barbara reflected, unconsciously of each other. It was largely because of his being there that she refrained from reminding Aaron of her presentment of trouble, when he arrived unexpectedly with the sisters.

Then the news came that Dick and Amabel were married, at a registry office, and Aaron breathed again; while Fanny's bearing became rather quieter, and she went to spend a few weeks with relatives on the mainland. Just before harvest the couple came home, apparently well pleased with each other. They settled down at once. Amabel, not afraid of work, appeared to like her new station in life; and when her mother paid them a visit a month later—without Lucinda, it was noticed—she, too, seemed to be content both with her daughter's prospects and with her son-in-law. So again Aaron breathed more freely; a family quarrel was averted. But he knew that he had not heard the last of what was now known as "the stocking elopement"; for already there was a marked difference in Nazewick's manner toward him.

In the meantime matters privately between Barbara and Roger assumed some of their former color and bearing. During the first week or so after the dance he went ashamed and contrititious in her presence, and dejected and self-accusing when alone. For, though he was no longer "a boy with a conscience," that attribute had grown with him—as Barbara knew, and took into account almost every time her imagination brought back the hot kiss; for which, so all unknown to him, she did not altogether blame him, even while her own conscience smote her in the matter of being Aaron's wife. At first her share of the secret change between them was merely to be watchful that they were not left without a third person being present. This avoided opportunities for him to open the subject with explanations and appeals for pardon. Her intention was to shut the incident down completely and give it a chance to die. And Roger noticed her tactics, was grateful, and made a new effort to hide the passion that consumed him, by trying afresh to be, with intermittent success, his former, natural self.

But about a fortnight after the barn incident, on a Sunday evening, Aaron complained of neuralgia in his head, and told Barbara and Roger that they must go to church without him. So they went, both of them being rather too guilty in thought to raise an excuse, lest he should be suspicious and ask awkward questions. But they were out again before the sermon began; this was at Barbara's instance, for she hated to sit there with those doubts and unpleasant

reflections coming and going in her mind. Purposely to waste time and avoid queries as to their being home so soon, and partly in a spirit of discontent and daring, she led the way by a roundabout route over fields; he walking quietly at her side, intuitively knowing the reason of this detour, and talking now and then of local affairs, while his mind was occupied really with the same subject that filled hers.

It was the end of May, with a high, cold, northerly wind and big, cumulous, light-grey clouds, with here and there a dark patch, blowing across a still sunny sky; while the offing was a welter of liquid movement and white foam, only the latter of which could be seen by Barbara and Roger. Presently they paused to watch the high-spirited play of a pair of colts, in a meadow over the hedge by which they were walking.

"They are happy enough," said Barbara, half-involuntarily, as she turned to go on again, without noticing—as Roger did—or even thinking that the animals were of opposite sexes.

"Yes. It seems to me that pretty well all the world has its share of that, except me," he replied, with more complaint in his tone than he usually employed in the course of a week; and Barbara was sorry at the remark she had made. . . . "But, there; I'm not the only one—small help though there is in that," he added, in a voice of resignation that went to her heart.

"No; there's plenty more, Roger, who are miserable

enough in this world," she ventured, hardly knowing what to say and half-wishful to be silent.

"There are, that's a fact. And I don't believe you're particularly happy either, one day with another."

"I was till you came back this time, at any rate," was her quick response, as she turned a rapid look on him.

In an instant that elemental light was in his eyes, which were fixed on hers, as he said in a rather strained manner:

"You feel it, then—as I do?"

Blaming herself for her rejoinder and seeing the construction he had put on it, which was only half-intentional on her part, she answered evasively, yet with sincerity:

"How do you think I can be happy altogether, when I see you so miserable day after day? How can I help being miserable as well—in a way?"

"Yes, there it is, you see. I'm always in it, causing trouble to somebody"; and he made a slash with his stick at some ragged robin that stood tall and pinky-red among bright-eyed speedwell by the hedge-side.

"Don't smash the flowers, there's none too much prettiness about as it is," said she incidentally, and gave him a searching, furtive look that escaped his notice. "Of course, I don't blame you. How could I, when I know you can't help it? Thats' the worst

of it; because if you could help it, I shouldn't feel sorry for you—not half so much, anyway."

He was gazing absently at a group of shorn sheep that lay with their lambs under a tree in the midst of a green and yellow lake of buttercups, and said with unusual emphasis, his mind partially on past things:

"If I'd known you were going to marry father, I'd never have come home again, any more than those sheep will grow the wool they've lost."

Thinking only of that suspicious change in herself, and looking at the ground, she replied, in sorrow, yet rather bitterly: "I almost wish you never had."

"Barbara!" he cried, snatching at her arm, "you don't mean it! or——"

"Don't touch me, Roger! Don't touch me! You mustn't do that!"

"If you do, you mean something else!" He was trying to pull her to him.

"Let me go, I tell you! Don't *touch* me!"

Thoroughly alarmed at herself, even more than by his action or that flaming excitement in his eyes, she jerked away, threw a glance around to ascertain if any other person was in sight, while her cheeks were like a Brunner rose, and said, in low, strained emphasis:

"If you do that again I'll never come out with you any more, nor be with you at all unless somebody else is there!"

"I'm sorry, Barbara. I'm sorry. But, my God! it's hard to bear!"

"Then go to your bedside and pray—as I do," she answered, looking at him in a way that words cannot describe, and only a woman can understand.

"As you do?" he queried sharply.

"Yes—for you, for your sake." And the half-lie caused her no prick of conscience; it was justified by the necessity of the moment.

That sudden hope in his heart died out as he said, with very unusual complaint in his tone: "Me again—always the cause of trouble! It's a pity I keep alive!"

"No, it isn't; but it's a pity you can't go away and forget this and marry someone else—now I'm your father's wife."

"Why did you marry him?" he asked suddenly, thinking that there was regret in her tragic reminder, and pausing again to look into her eyes.

"Because I loved him," Barbara replied honestly, yet aware that there was a secret sense of the past in what she said. "And he always loved me," she added, as the statement of a mere fact. But Roger took it all on its face value, and the reference to his father as a hint on the lateness of his own awakening to the same condition, and remarked:

"Yes; I deserve it. It serves me right," he moved on, again jabbing the offending stick vigorously at the low hedge-bank. It went into a hole, causing him

to go almost headfirst obliquely onto the bank, and instantly wasps began to swarm about them.

"Look what you're doing, you silly!" cried Barbara, and jerked her sunshade excitedly around their heads. "You'll be stung!—or both of us."

He was up again waving his hat to drive away the vengeance-seeking insects, whose nest he had disturbed, when Barbara exclaimed: "Oh!" and sprang away, clapping one hand to the side of her neck. Now, heedless of the wasps, he was after her in a moment.

"Where is it?" he enquired, as she paused at that safe distance which she knew ought to have been gained at first.

"Here. I can feel it moving."

Immediately he drew her hand away, gave the place a smart slap, then tried to pull aside the neck of her bodice.

"Don't choke me," Barbara expostulated.

"Well, undo it then."

"I can't undo my frock in the field!"

"Don't be a goose!"

He had it unfastened and picked out the wasp, which his blow had killed; while Barbara looked around, again fearful of anyone seeing them, for scandalous gossip was so easily set going. In a minute or two he had procured some dock-leaf, bruised it in his hands, and was applying the soothing juice to where the sting had gone in, as they each had done on similar occasions when they were boy and girl together. Then

they continued their slow way homeward, saying but little, and that little on nothing of interest to them; while their minds were full of the great thing of their lives—till it became necessary to agree to tell Aaron that they had left the church early because Barbara had a slight headache, and that the wasp stung her as they walked over the fields for the purpose of “letting the wind blow the headache away.”

## CHAPTER XVII

So the summer passed. The harvest was got in, and Aaron and Roger were making the round of their arable land, planning operations for the autumn and winter. This took them near the schooner; and, as they happened to look at her together, the father said:

"Why don't you sell her?"

Aaron had often thought of this lately, and regretted that she lay there uselessly, depreciating all the time, instead of being a source of profit—or sold, and the proceeds put to use.

"No; I don't care to," was Roger's rather evasive answer, turning his face in another direction, with an evident desire to change the subject.

"But what on earth for, man? She's no good there!"

"No, I suppose she isn't. But I don't like to part with her."

Aaron glanced at him in surprise. This everlasting depression of Roger's was beginning to tell on him, to make him wonder if it would ever pass away, and to ask himself now and then if he was right in his idea as to the cause of it; at the same time he still had the old sympathetic feeling for his son, and was pleased and proud at the way in which the latter had

taken to farming and was shaping to make a fine success of the venture.

A capital excuse occurred to Roger's mind, and he added: "Ah, you don't know what a sailor's love for his ship is, father."

"Well, I've heard about it pretty often; an' it seems to me it's a pity some sailors take wives as well as ships. But I should be mighty glad if you'd exchange her for a wife," Aaron answered, with bluff practicality.

"Another thing, I may want her yet, you know——"

"You don't mean to say you'll go to sea again, now?" came the amazed interruption.

"Oh, I may. Why not? One never knows."

"If I thought you'd do that, now all's going so well, I'd burn her right away!" Aaron declared vehemently. Roger said nothing; his mind was busy with this real reason of his keeping the sloop, and of that which was the cause of the reason. Presently Aaron added in his old kindly way: "No, I don't think you'll go to sea again, Roger. You know you don't like it, at the bottom of things. You stop here with me an' follow the trade of the family; it's the oldest trade on earth, and it's the best—if you're not dying to make a *lot* of money."

Roger's answer was hardly to the point. Aaron saw the wisdom of letting the matter drop, for his son could be as stubborn as he was at times. Thus they walked along in silence—Roger's mind full of the subject that filled it mostly; while his father wondered

again what on earth it was that kept the young man from being the brighter fellow that he used to be, and wished greatly that he could make him be once more what he had been. Then Aaron struck the question: "Has he made a hash of things by marrying some woman he's ashamed to bring home? Sailors do it at times, I believe," was his silent comment; and there and then he opened the matter, to be driven back immediately to further wondering and wishing by the emphatic assurance that nothing of the sort had ever taken place. Finally, half-desperate at being baffled by a cause so flimsy, yet unexplainable, but with its palpable effect there before his eyes, he burst out:

"Look here, Roger, there's something wrong, very much wrong somewhere! What is it?" He pulled up sharply with so abrupt a movement in speech and action that Roger halted similarly, turned about, and the two men gazed straight into each other's eyes. "Now tell us what it is. For Heaven's sake, speak out, my lad—as you used to—and let's know what it is! What is it? I'd give *any* thing to know!"

"Oh, nothing," said Roger in a tone so casual that it hardly hinted at bitterness; then he turned to go on again, having quite recovered his composure during his father's earnest and rather slow words. "I've just changed a bit, that's all. Don't worry—it only makes me the more inclined to go to sea again. Come along, let's get the round made before dark," Roger added and moved forward.

For a moment Aaron gazed at his son's back, non-

plussed; for now, he had thought, the trouble was cornered and would be scotched. Then he, too, went on, saying, about a yard on Roger's left rear, "Changed a bit? Good Lord in Heaven, I should think you have, not a bit, but a whole haystack—a crop, in fact. And I'm blest if I can quite believe you now. Are you really sure, Roger, there's nothing I can do to make you happy an' contented here?" Aaron finished with his voice again full of strong, tender earnestness.

"No, nothing, thanks," the son replied, his head once more bent down a little as he plodded on, and his gaze on the ground as usual.

"Because I'd do *any* thing—any *mortal* thing—*give* you anything, if only—"

Aaron paused. The words "give you anything," emphasized as they had been, had jerked Roger's face around toward his father, with a curious, impenetrable look in the deep brown eyes and a baffling expression on the face; while behind it all the son's mind was saying: "Give me anything. Would you give me your wife. His *wife*? Good God, she's my mother!" And with another sudden jerk he was going forward as before.

"Roger, I would, upon my word—I'd give anything I have to make you like you were, an' us all comfortable and happy together." Aaron was striding after him again, that momentary glance lost temporarily in his absorbing desire to get at the root

of the trouble. "Now, tell me, *isn't* there something I can do?"

"No, father, nothing," floated back resignedly to Aaron.

"Nothing at all?"

"No, nothing. Not even the Almighty in heaven can alter things for me now. I'm changed, that's all. Now let's finish the round, or we shall have to tackle it again to-morrow."

So the round was made and the planning completed; but all the time at the back of Aaron's mind there were the queries: Has he told the truth? And if he has, hadn't he better go to sea again till he works off the shame of his failure?

Thus autumn deepened. Men, women and things generally on Foulness Island settled themselves down to another winter in the grip of that grey North Sea; and it began to appear to Aaron that the gloom of his son was fastening itself on the whole household. His young wife was becoming almost as quiet as Roger. Margaret—now wearing into years—had never been much of a talker, yet even she seemed to be affected by the general gloom of the place. This was mostly felt by Aaron in the evenings, when he had been accustomed to hear Barbara read, or to talk with her of their neighbors. Now she was always "too busy to read." Roger read much in the dark evenings, but he did not like reading aloud. So that the snug dining-room had become a place of long silences, and this indoor change was telling on Aaron's temperament. In

addition Nazewick was moving for an open rupture with him about their mutual farming, in reality, as Aaron guessed, because of the "stocking elopement." And he required no telling that the old envy, rancor and isolation would be sure to follow immediately on the heels of such a quarrel.

Was it that the spirit of things local was asserting its primeval, never-ending, irremediable dominance over the frail humans who, in the pride and short-sightedness of their brief successes, or in the narrowly absorbing business of each individual—so all-important to him or her, so petty and immaterial in reality—had forgotten, or never heeded, if recognized, this silent, subtle, under-working, overshadowing, mist-like, yet strangely mighty power? Or did they never think of the everlasting, irresistible, never-quiescent, moulding force of their flat lands and dreary marshes, of the grey skies and the always-near horizons, of the rivers and wide creeks that made them an island on three sides, and the great thundering or moaning sea on the other side—subduing all else to its ages-old subtle, inimitable, unbounded power? Were they really dead to the mystic, never-failing influence of these features in their surroundings? Some of them, yes, undoubtedly, the light-hearted Shelford and a few others, mostly young persons, in particular. The majority—"dumb, driven cattle" in a way; primitively articulate; dogged by the sleuth-hound of their environment; hating the winter winds, the enclosing rivers, and the grey, stretching sea; with only the fear

of God and bad seasons in some of their hearts, while others were governed more by dread of the latter and of being scandalized by their neighbors. Was there any wonder that they were close-mouthed, secretive, suspicious, slow to think and slower still to act, with some of the superstitions of a thousand years running through them and handed down generally from mother to daughter?

Yet in the tiny minority—notably the rector, Rushley (the schoolmaster), Aaron and Wallasea—there were minds that saw, and tongues that sometimes spoke of, this dominating sense of the surroundings, even to terming it “the spirit of the island.” And Aaron was now asking himself, secretly, if, after all, this was the canker in his domestic happiness? It was said by the old men and women that others—names, times and farmsteads being always stated in proof—who had risen to undue prosperity, had never been able to pass it on to the next generation; that sooner or later something had come along and levelled things down again to a semblance of that evenness which marked the whole physical outlook of Foulness. Aaron knew of these stories; he could remember one case that happened when he was a boy, and had heard his father tell of another. But, smitten though he was with some of this superstition, he would not admit that “the spirit of the island” was beginning the ruination of *his* home. No, it was Roger’s gloomy melancholy that had got hold on them all; and, pity the young man as he did greatly, he cast about secretly

for some satisfactory reason to move him out of the house. His domestic peace had ever been a sort of fetish to Aaron; and his marriage with Barbara, then the home-coming of Roger—which, in the father's mind, was subsequent to the more important happening—had increased the bulk if not the sacredness of his idol. So that now, when he saw his prized possession slipping away, for some reason that baffled his questioning—except that it must be due to Roger's depressing presence—he grew to look on his son as a baneful influence that must be removed somehow, and the sooner the better. It was for this purpose that he had given Churchend notice to quit Monkton Barn at Lady Day, and had made a private compact with the old man to forego the quarter's rent on the condition that he (Churchend) said that he was leaving of his own free will. This arrangement was made to prevent Roger from thinking that the house was being emptied in order to establish him there, with or without a wife; and Churchend, who had come into a small legacy, sufficient for him and Betty, was going to live in a cottage by the mill, with Betty to keep house for him—knowing that, even had it been needed, neither Elsie nor Bob would have offered them a home at their farm.

Then, about eleven months after Roger returned home, one bright forenoon, when Aaron was away on the land, Roger suddenly reeled into the kitchen—where Barbara and Margaret were busy with some household affair—his face ghastly white and bloody,

his left arm hanging limp, blood running from the hand, and his clothes torn and muddy. With a gasp he dropped onto a chair near the doorway; the chair wobbled, and both it and he went over.

"Oh, mercy, what's the matter!" cried Barbara, running to him, while Margaret tried to hasten after her. "Roger, Roger! Oh, what in heaven has happened?" She was on her knees, supporting his head, and wiping his face with her apron. "Margaret, quick, go for some brandy!—quick, he's fainting!" Margaret turned and went. "Roger, dear, whatever has happened?"

"Not much, Barb," he murmured, opening his eyes again faintly; "only I'm knocked . . . about a bit. . . . The bull, . . . he . . . Send Asplin for the doctor, old girl. I——" His head fell back. Barbara thought he was dying, injured in some vital part, and, frantic at her impotence, she kissed him, and knew not what to do. But he had not so far lost consciousness as not to feel her kiss.

Asplin and another man appeared in the doorway and blundered forward, hurrying out the information that the stud bull had suddenly attacked Roger at close quarters in the cowyard, while they were too far off to be of service, although they saw it; it was all done in a moment; the bull seemed to throw him over the wall, etc.—when Barbara broke in with:

"Run, one of you, run at once, for Dr. Potton! He's over from Wakering to-day!—this is his day! Run to the surgery and bring him!—you know, by

the mill!" The last four words were addressed to the younger man—a newish hand from the mainland—as he sprang through the doorway. "You go out and find the master! Hurry, Aspin, hurry!—or Roger may be dead before he comes!"

And off went Aspin, as Margaret came in with the brandy. Together they poured some of the spirit between Roger's teeth. His eyes opened again, and he said slowly:

"If you can stop the bleeding in my arm a bit, I may be better then. It's my arm . . . I don't think there's much else—not serious."

Hurriedly they cut away the sleeves of jacket, shirt and vest, and saw that the arm was torn fearfully. It seemed as if the bull's horn had gone between the muscle and the bone, ripping one away from the other. As best they could they stanched the bleeding, lifted him to the settle, ascertained that the other wounds were superficial and attended to them, then tried to make him otherwise comfortable. And Barbara waited, in a fever of anxiety for Roger, and the suddenly obtrusive, now rapidly growing consciousness of a great joy that was an equally great, guilty pain.

Dr. Potton arrived, and Aaron hurried in almost on his heels. Roger's injuries were properly dressed; he was carried to bed, where a further examination was made, and the doctor said that the arm was the only serious hurt, although Roger had been shaken badly altogether. He was put to sleep by the means

of a draught; the doctor gave Barbara certain of his orders, then went away with Aaron, giving the remainder of them to him; while Barbara stood in the parlor, looking through the window and along the road, where Aaron and Dr. Potton had disappeared, realizing, with a kind of bitter horror (as she had half admitted to herself during the past few weeks), that she was in love with Roger. But for the moment it did not appeal to her in the sense of her being *in love with her husband's son*. So far the feeling was that her sisterly affection for Roger had, at first half-unconsciously and by the path of increasing sympathy and the knowledge that he loved her in a strange, deep way, developed into the passion that a woman experiences only once in her life. As she dwelt on the bare fact she saw only its pathos, its tragedy. Then, as her thought went after Aaron and bounded back to Roger, the ghastliness, the seeming criminality of it arose in her mind; and she turned to go, mechanically, anywhere, nowhere, saying aloud, "Oh, my God!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

ON the Saturday evening after Roger's accident with the bull, Wallasea, Easten, Nazewick, Church-end, Rushley and a small farmer from the south end of the island, who was up about some business with Wallasea, were all gathered in the low-ceilinged tap-room of The Dragon; while the most of their laborers occupied the bar. Outside November weather held sway. A raw, biting southeaster swept the lowland, accompanied now and then by thick mists of rain. Inside there was rude comfort, broken in a way by ruder comments on Aaron and his affairs generally,—except that they and others had now about ceased to say that he had kept Barbara for himself all along. Nor was there any reason for them to fear interruption on the part of Aaron, because it had never been his habit to spend an evening in either of the inns on the island, and seldom even to look in at one.

"Well, as I said, it's a vees-itätion, that's my opin-yun, a bit of a vees-itätion on him for his high-an'-mighty," Nazewick remarked, in the slow, rasping voice and manner that characterized him; while his gingery beard, sparse and rather long, like himself, waved gently up and down with the motion of his protruding lower jaw.

"But he don't suffer, man—only as a father. 'Tisn't him what's got the hurt," put in Churchend, who had received good monetary and other treatment at Aaron's hands, and was therefore still on his side.

"Don't he, in-deed? That's wha-at you know about it, neigh-bor; but I knows Aa-ron Roog-wood better 'an that. Of course, I don't say as it isn't a peety for poor young Rog-er; he ain't got this new Roog-wood touch about *him*,—more like this grand-father, he is—good as the next, same as our-selves." Some of the others smiled; for Nazewick's Christian charity was known to be none too plentiful at any time. In fact, it was thought generally that Fanny (who was home again, looking none the worse for her jilting, and showing that she had acquired "style" somewhere during her absence, as if to say that she was determined not to have another man taken from under her nose by such "accomplishments") had inherited her bits of spleen from him, as she had gained some of her physical appearance; but his venom was of a deeper, harder nature. "Yes, you can laugh; but I counts my-self as good as aa-ny Roog-wood," he added, after a drink of his ale.

"Of course, you do, Mr. Nazewick—so do we all, I expect, in one way or another; but I'm afraid that doesn't always make us as good as the next. I know it doesn't make me so," said the schoolmaster, who, in his quiet and usually conciliatory manner, was never slow to speak for Aaron.

"Good for you, Mr. Rushley. Give the Devil his

due an' let him go, ses I," was Churchend's comment.

"Give him his due an' burn him!" came waspishly from little Easten, twisting his big moustache into a war-like curl. He had never forgiven Aaron for that land affair, and it appeared that he never would.

"How can you burn the Devil, man, w'en he lives in the fire?" Churchend questioned, facetiously, and anxious not to miss an opportunity to play his usual, and commonly unappreciated, rôle of wit.

"Well, then, keep him there; an' you can keep him comp'ny. You won't be missed much here, anyway," Easten growled, then turned and added, "What say you, Wallasea? Gi'e me a match."

Wallasea handed out his box, but said nothing. Rushley was saying a few words on good-fellowship, when Churchend, in ironic humor, interrupted with:

"Don't be nasty, now. W'en the Devil casts his net you won't be outside on it, never fear."

"Casts his net! Al'us in fire an' got a net! Bah! Shows what you've got in your head!" was Easten's scornful answer, as he put Wallasea's box of matches into his pocket, and tried in a way to hear what the latter was saying in a low tone to his friend from the other end of the island.

"Of course, he is; an' of course he's got a net, else how'd he catch the likes o' you? He's a fisherman wi' a wire net. Shows w'ree you are w'en you don't know the Devil's up-to-date same as——"

"Same as Meester Roog-wood. Aye, neighbor?"

interrupted Nazewick, and addressed the question to Wallasea, as Churchend hesitated for a simile.

"Well, I don't know; an' I don't want to sit in judgment on me fellowman," Wallasea replied slowly, raising his dark face, and letting those keen eyes of his roam penetratingly from one to another of the company. That morning he had received a letter from his son, Fred, saying that the latter was on his way home; for which reason he was not disposed to be particularly uncharitable toward his former friend. Seeing that he had more to say, the others waited, while he lit his pipe and called for the landlord to fill his glass again, then he resumed in a matter-of-fact manner, "I told him, w'en that bull of his nearly had the life out o' me, as the Devil would sit at his hearth, an' I was right. He's prosp'r'ous—prosp'r'ous enough even for him. He's makin' money fast, ev'ry season —wet or fine, he does well. But the Evil One's there, all the same; an' you can see it—ev'ry now an' then there's some trouble o' some sort. Not as we don't all get our share. But Rugwood's a man as takes troubles to heart—some sorts o' trouble; an' he's gettin' a lot o' that sort, one time with another. There was Roger goin' to sea. He'd have given half his acres for a son as took to farmin'."

"Yes, but he is back again, and doing very well," put in the schoolmaster.

"All right! I should think he is just," said Churchend to no one in particular.

"So he is, Mr. Rushley; but things ain't all right,

you know. You knows that, so do we all. Roger isn't what he was,—he isn't farmin' for love of it. An' that's worryin' his father. I knows Aaron."

"But he's bin all right—friendly with ev'rybody that'll be friendly wi' him—since he was married. An' what's gone amiss with him since then?" came seriously from Churchend, as he pushed a spittoon away with one foot, and leaned forward, with an arm on the corner of the table, his round, good-natured, self-satisfied and none too intelligent face thrust out, and looking all the redder by contrast with the inch-and-a-half of grey hair that circled it from temple to temple, like a rather dirty-white frill.

Wallasea waited a moment. Inconsiderate Easten was giving the landlord an order in a loud voice, and the dark, smallish man wanted all attention and quietude for the proper effect of his announcement. When peace was regained he said, with becoming decision:

"The marriage."

"The marriage?" "What's wrong with it?" "They seem happy enough together." "Never heard of any trouble," were the mixed questions and comments of Rushley, Churchend and the man from the other end of the island.

"All the same, I tell you, it's bringin' Rugwood trouble. God hasn't blessed the union."

"How?" "I don't see what you mean," came from Aaron's two friends.

"There's no child," Wallasea said in telling significance.

"Oh, there's plenty of time for that!" cried Churchend optimistically.

"Is there?" was Wallasea's quiet, disbelieving query. "Well, you don't know, you see. I don't talk with Aaron nowadays—p'r'aps he wouldn't talk with me if I did." Rushley and Churchend interrupted to assure him of the contrary, while Easten delivered himself of more impotent spleen. "Anyhow, that's as may be," Wallasea continued, "I was sayin' I don't talk to him; but I hears things, an' I knows Aaron. An' mark you, they've bin married nearly a year, an' there's nothing expected yet; an' Aaron's taking it to heart, same as he takes it about Roger not gettin' a wife an' more Rugwoods to overrun the island. An' now this case o' the bull—mind you, same bull as nearly did for Barb'ra six years ago last summer, as nearly did for me—his prize bull. He's goin' to sell it, they say——"

"So he is, an' serve him right," said Easten

"Yes, because his wife wants him to," Rushley remarked.

"An' that'll be another trouble. I tells you, I know Aaron. Mighty fine an' big at most times, even w'en he's in trouble many a time, carryin' it like a man; but it's gnawin' his vitals all the same. It don't wash out soon with him. You know, that stockin' elopement was a blow to him—in more ways 'an one, I'll bet. I read him years an' years like a book."

"An' they say his wife dreamt aforehand there'd be trouble out of him bringin' them girls here as he did," said Easten, his native touch of superstition temporarily overshadowing his hatred.

"Like e-nough," Nazewick rasped quietly, he having been content to hold his peace while Wallasea filed the indictment and summed up the situation. "She's a bit of a queer un in her way,—used to walk in her sleep, an' read book af-ter book, an' talk big rot to my Fa-anny about what she didn't un-der-stand, for I'm blest if I did."

"But you wouldn't measure her corn with your bushel. Would you?" Churchend asked, meaning the question to be a sly shot at his gingery neighbor's intelligence. For a minute or two this drew the other men's attentions from their serious subjects, making each one of them, except Wallasea, pass some more or less jocular remark on or about Churchend's observation; and he concluded with, "A sovereign-purse half-ful's better than a pocket-ful o' copper, you know."

"Come, come, Mr. Churchend," was Rushley's amused admonition, which the others at once followed with some similar comments, except Wallasea, who had never been known to joke or smile on any point of mentality. That was a sacred subject to him, whether it was his own or some other person's at the moment. Heedless of it all, Nazewick began, in rasping, sardonic indifference:

"Lor' for-give you all——"

"An' we all needs it. An' He's got lots o' mercy to spare, as Aaron says," Churchend interpolated.

"I don't mind. They don't make me a bird as says they sees me with a fea-ther in me hat, aa-ny more 'an they're wise 'cause they looks so-lid an' says noth-ing. All I cares about is to see them get it wha-at ought to have it, an' that's why I'm glad to see Aa-ron Roog-wood gettin' his share."

"Why, what's gone wrong to make you feel so unneighborly? I thought, from hearsay, as you were workin' with him in a way," said the visitor, who knew but very little of Aaron at first-hand, and thought of him merely as a hard-working, honest farmer whose unusual success deserved proper respect.

"So I was, but I aa-in't."

"What for? What's the matter with the man?" the other persisted, while Rushley and Churchend listened and were attentive, feeling that, to some extent, here was a Daniel come to judgment.

"Maa-tter with him? You try him?"

"Oh, but come, that's no answer. Hang it, you can't hang a man without a verdict. Leastwise, 'tain't Inglish if you do."

"No, that's true enough," was Wallasea's casual comment.

"So come, now, don't say the man's bad an' all that, 'nless you say how."

"Try him, I tells you. 'Tis a nice job you'll take on, if you do. I can tell you as I've had my bel-ly-ful.

To say no-thin' of him a-bringing his faan-cy-stock-in'd niece here to run off wi' my gel's sweetheart."

"No, he didn't, now! No, he didn't!" Churchend corrected with some vigor, and added an attempt at wit, while Rushley said much the same in other words. "What's all this for? Owin' to him buyin' your young bull?" concluded Churchend.

"Buy-in' him? He made me sell 'im."

"Well, he paid you well, I'll be bound—a fair bull of a price, I know."

Nazewick only grunted and looked again at Aaron's new champion, who resumed his own line, independent of them all, and wound up with:

"You can't hang a man 'cause he's got a bad name, any more 'an you can make him guilty by thinkin' he is. You know you said it don't make you a bird 'cause somebody sticks a feather in your hat."

This brought such a burst of satirical laughter from Churchend, a less exhibition from Rushley and even a smile from Wallasea, that Nazewick felt himself called on to make a thorough defence of himself. In the middle of this in walked Dick Shelford, dropped onto a chair by Rushley, and ordered his usual half-pint of ale; for, with all his love of sociability, Dick, unlike his father, was always temperate in drink and food; as, when "dressed," he was always smart without any appearance of care. Immediately on his appearance Nazewick's gingery beard began to wag even more slowly than what was its wont, and with less assurance than formerly, if not with less venom.

After listening a while, knowing all that was meant, Dick looked steadily across at Nazewick and said quietly:

"As you're talking about my uncle, Mr. Nazewick, an' not talking a ha'porth of truth, I'll ask you to suspend judgment a bit, till I've had my drink an' gone. D'ye see?"

Nazewick, stubborn in a way and not altogether a coward, returned Dick's gaze; but his lustreless, light-grey eyes were no match for Dick's bright blue ones. As for the latter's "Mr." there was no irony in that; it was merely the usual form of address from the young man to the older one.

"See? W'at the dev-vil do you mean? Tellin' me I'm a-lying! Me, as is old enough to be your fa-ther neearly twice!"

"What, at fifty-two? Not on Foulness, Mr. Nazewick. Besides, years don't give you the right to tell lies," answered Dick, as before; and Churchend put in with:

"No, else w'at a pair of beauties Noah an' Methuselah would ha'e been! Aye, Mr. Rushley? You knows them chaps better 'an we do."

The schoolmaster smiled, out of a naturally large charity toward anything that was mentally inefficient, and continued his attention to the new phase of things as they particularly affected "old vinegar face," as young persons sometimes spoke of Nazewick, who at length said:

"Like your sauce, I'm blest if it aa-int! Coom-ing

here, tell-ing a man o' my years as he's a li-ar! You an' your *un-cle!* My stars an' garr-ters, w'aat next I wonder!"

"Yes, Mr. Nazewick," Dick replied imperturbably, "Mr. Rugwood *is* my uncle. I'm in his family now, an' what's said against 'em, specially against him, is said against me. Truth I don't mind; but lies—not while I'm there, else there'll be trouble." It was well known that both Dick and his wife now went frequently to Rugwood House.

"Troo-ble?"

"Yes. I've always felt a bit drawn to Mr. Rugwood——"

"Even when he took Barb'ra from you," said Easten bitingly.

"Which he never did, because I never had her, and shouldn't ever have got her; so you can chew that cud, Easten." Here there was no Mr., owing to the latter being only eight or ten years older than Dick, who added, "And, as I said, now I'm in the family I'm one of 'em."

"An' do you think, Dick She-el-ford, as I sha'n't say w'aat I thinks of Aaron Roog-wood, 'cause you have stoo-ck your faan-cy face in thee-re."

"I say you mustn't tell lies of us, Mr. Nazewick, that's all."

"An' I say I'll say w'aat I thinks I'll say!"

"And I say if you think lies and say what you think, I shall tweak your damned old nose—no more and no less."

In a moment Nazewick was on his feet, stick in hand, two glasses overset at his elbow, his pipe quivering between his lips—for he was short of teeth—and he threatening to strike Dick, if the latter did not take his words back. This drew in the landlord, Rushley and Churchend hurriedly as conciliators; meanwhile the other men remained seated, and said but little, quietly. Dick maintained his calm demeanor, refused to take back anything, added that he would keep his word as to what he had said, took a drink, relit his pipe, and leaned back, looking defiance at Nazewick, who slowly spluttered out his venom till the schoolmaster persuaded him to sit down. A minute or so later his son, Harry, entered—still as spruce and “careful of his clothes” as he was when he carelessly courted the equally “fashionable” Elsie. In an instant Nazewick was on his feet again, saying:

“I’m gla-ad you’ve come. Here’s that Dick She-el-ford a-swear-in’ he’ll tweak my damned old nose.”

“Serve you right, too, if you put it into his doorway without leave,” was Harry’s matter-of-fact answer.

“W-aat?” cried his father, puckering his brows in amazement, which the others knew to be half assumed, because of the general knowledge as to how he and Harry got on together.

Harry merely looked at the landlord and said: “Bring me a pint.”

“W'aat?” his father echoed.

"Sit down, and don't make such a fool of yourself. All the week you've been tryin' to stir up strife, just because Mr. Rugwood wouldn't do as you wanted about the bull. And if you think I'm going to lend you hand at it, you're mistaken."

His father did sit down, there and then—"lookin' as if Sunday had come in the middle of the week," Churchend afterward said, and declared that "Nazewick kept his ginger-flag wavin' from that minute forty-three minutes be the clock." Harry, however, heard but little of it; hardly had the landlord put down his pint of ale, when he picked it up, beckoned to Dick, and the two went amicably together to another room—which action no doubt lent energy to his father's slow flow of words.

## CHAPTER XIX

WALLASEA's assurances, in *The Dragon*, were quite true as to Aaron being disappointed secretly because there appeared to be no prospect of Barbara presenting him with a child. But the dark, little man, uncommonly astute within his lights, had no more than his knowledge of Aaron whereon to build his convictions. It was wholly misleading of him to say that he "heard things" in connection with this matter, because so far it lay too deep in Aaron's heart for anyone to know it except himself. As some of the others had said, there was plenty of time for what he so ardently desired; but, up-to-date as he was in his work and some other things, Aaron was largely influenced by the two local superstitions: That if there was no child within the first year of marriage, seven years would pass before one came; and that if one did not come, it was a proof that God had not blessed the union. And now he had the additional sorrow—for at the time it was a sorrow to him—of fearing that Roger was not only maimed for life, but that the affair would set him against cattle-rearing (out of which Aaron made so handsome a profit every year), if not against farming altogether.

As for his promise to sell the prize stud-bull—

entirely at Barbara's persistent advice: He, too, had begun to think that there was some vein of ill-luck attached to the animal, and that it would be the cause of worse mischief if he kept it longer. He was also rather reconciled to parting with it, because he had secured complete possession of the two-year-old which he and Nazewick had owned together in a way. This had been brought about first by a fair offer of £15; then, as Aaron's desire grew, an increase in price till the original offer was doubled; and finally by refusing to feed the animal on his (Aaron's) special and secret method, thus indirectly telling his partner to take the bull home. And as Nazewick was generally on the verge of being hard-up, often having to borrow money with which to buy seeds at sowing-time, he was eager to take Aaron's £30, but was deeply incensed at what was largely a forced surrender.

Briefly, the whole of the episode—small in itself, yet the origin of larger things—was due to Aaron coming to the conclusion that he could not work with Nazewick, as he had done with Wallasea; for this second effort of his to spread his energies beyond his own acres had resulted in finding that Nazewick was both difficult to lead into new ways, and that he was always pretending, with some vinegary subtlety, to have knowledge which he had not. Thus with the sale of the young bull a complete break had come, to Nazewick's deep-seated and bigoted resentment, and to Aaron's expectation that a mountain would be made

out of the matter and he again become the butt of wider-spread dislike.

In this manner Christmas drew near, with every promise of a sad festival at Rugwood House compared with what the previous one had been. Roger was still in bed, with no danger to his life, as there had been when septic poisoning threatened during the first two weeks and amputation seemed to be necessary from day to day; yet with an arm that appeared as if it would never be of practical use again.

And still, in spite of her intermittent determination and her equally fitful efforts to stop it, Barbara's love grew, as she tended and watched Roger in his pain and helplessness, patient and uncomplaining yet not cast down. It was a love against which fighting was useless; it was her destiny—their destiny, and Barbara soon grew to look on it in that light, yet suffered the more whenever she thought of Aaron as her husband. Many and many a time did her cool hand lie long and lightly on Roger's feverish forehead, not as it would have done six months ago, but motheringly, with that deep sense of protection, soothing and security which no woman can hide from the suffering man she loves.

And occasionally—in daytime during the early stages, when the shock to his system had pulled Roger very low; and now in the evening, when all danger was over, and Barbara seemed to be staying longer in his room than was necessary for the last bandaging or comfort-making for the night—Aaron would walk

in quietly, in those carpet-slippers she had made for him, startling her into sudden, embarrassed movement, as she sat or stood at the bedside with her hand on Roger's head. Once the abrupt turn brought him and her face-to-face, sufficiently within the shaded light for him to see her flush scarlet; but he said nothing on the subject—to have done so would not have been true to his nature. Barbara knew this and endeavored to avoid a repetition. But Aaron was curious enough to try for the same effect, or prove to himself that it was only a chance happening, and was successful where he had hoped for failure. Then he watched, listened, brooded, roused himself up, swearing under his breath that he would "not be a deluded fool like that black-a-moor," fell again into looking on himself as a neglected husband, became suspicious of he scarcely knew what, and found that he was developing something like hatred of his own son. The gloom that had come into the house with Roger had drawn Barbara into its grip and was now settling on Aaron, willy-nilly—for he fought against it, at times with all the strength there was in him, putting it and that vague, as yet half-nameless, suspicion down with the resolute hand of a master-fighter; but generally the resistance was the dogged obstinacy of his make, combined with a determination to practise here that "gentlemanliness" for which he had so often been upbraided by his fellows, both spitefully behind his back and in attempted humor to his face.

This was the condition of things two days before

Christmas. And as Roger was still in bed—mending favorably, but not allowed to get up—Aaron decided that there should be no merriment in the house to disturb him. It was of no use for him to assert that a little noise downstairs would not hurt him, nor of Barbara to declare the same; even Dr. Potton's "it won't do any harm if there isn't too much of it," was of no avail.

"Roger wants quiet," he maintained; "an' I want him to have it, because I want him to get well. So there'll be no romping and dancing an' singing here this Christmas. What we want we shall get at Dick's; and that'll save Margaret an' Sarah (the other servant) a lot of trouble an' work."

As the former happened to be present, and was a person of much privilege, she said: "Dear me, don't think as we minds a bit of extra cookin' an' washin'-up an' that! Not us, indeed! 'Tisn't as if nothing was done ready. Turkey an' a pair o' ducks an' two fine hares ha'e been hangin' these three days. An' the puddin's an' mince pies an' all that's made. So don't talk o' savin' us trouble, please."

"Well, we'll save you the cooking, anyway," was Aaron's dogged answer.

"No, you won't do that either," she replied with equal stubbornness.

"Why?"

"Because they'll have to be cooked, all the same."

"But not in a heap, and with fuss and extras of all sorts,"

"As for the stuffin'—that's nothin'."

"Anyhow, there are going to be no parties here. So look on that as settled."

"An' a poor Christmas it'll be for poor Roger, my word!—with no 'Christians, Awake,' or a bit o' song or music or noise or anything Christmassy in the place! Won't it now?" Margaret persisted, while Barbara looked on and listened, eager to say much more to the same effect, yet afraid to speak a tenth of what was in her mind, because she knew that Aaron was in a sense suspicious of her attentions to Roger, and her very culpability made her fear a upas-tree where as yet there was only a seed.

"It's all for his benefit, Margaret, and that should be enough," said Aaron, in the manner of one who wished to close the subject. But Margaret had not done; for, turning her small, rather shrunken yet energetic figure toward him, she asked:

"An' what of us, then? Me an' Sarah an' Sam an' Jack (the two young laborers who lived in the house)? Ain't we to have any Christmas?"

"I'll make it up to them. As for you—and Sarah, too, if she likes—you can come with us to Mr. Shelford's," was his reply.

"Not me! W'at, an' leave poor Roger alone here? I sha'n't; an' I know Barb'ra wouldn't. Her or me's got to be here wile he's in bed," Margaret said emphatically, with no suspicion of there being anything more than "a family affection" between Roger and

her mistress; then she turned to Barbara and added: "Ain't we?"

"Of course, we have," answered the latter. "Don't be so obstinate, Aaron. We all want our Christmas at home, same as usual. And as Dr. Potton says there's no harm in it, if we don't go too far—which, of course, we sha'n't—I don't see why you want to upset things so."

"That's just what I'm not doing. I'm trying to avoid an upset, and I'm going to. We shall go to Dick's, as I've said; and Margaret and Sarah can go to any invitation on Christmas eve. Then," he concluded, as an act of conciliation, "if Roger's well enough, as he probably will be, we'll all have our share at home on New Year's Eve."

With that they had to try to be content, much as Margaret went away grumbling, and Barbara was dissatisfied in silence. Nor had Roger's subsequent effort to the same end any further effect on his father. Dick and Amabel had specially invited Aaron and Barbara, on the previous day, when they heard that there was to be no joviality at Rugwood House; and there Aaron was determined that he and his wife should go.

Barbara was seriously grieved at having to be merry-making away from home, when she would so much rather have been attending to Roger's needs; but Aaron went half-pleased that he had shown all a father's consideration for his son, yet conscious that he was also gratifying a small, deep vein of meanness

and retaliation for the neglect (in his quiet times he had no worse name for it as yet) which Barbara and Roger had put upon him during the past month. For up to this there was so little on which to fasten in her bearing toward himself, and nothing of a definite nature. She had rarely been enthusiastic with him over anything since she reached the years of discretion, except when he won a prize for cattle, or against his enemies after the fight by The Dragon; and since the wedding her rather undemonstrative nature had developed more of its practical side. So that there was nothing particularly new in her quiet bearing toward him, and he recognized this fact, even to thinking—as they drove through a raw, damp south-easterly wind on their way to Dick's place on Christmas night—that she was no more serious in manner than a year of married life and her change of position in his house warranted. He would have been very sorry to have had *his wife* like some he could mention, he reflected—even so happy-go-lucky yet “all there” as bouncing Amabel, model of a wife though *she* was for Dick; or stiff and starchy Elsie, with her thin veneer and aping of fashion; or dowdy Mrs. Rushley, who made such a fool of herself with that monkey. No, a thousand times over Barbara was the one on all the island for him; and if she was growing to be a little too quiet and serious—well, he must take the tares with the wheat; at all events, it was good, rich, red grain,—far and away the best in the market.

Thus did his great love find reasonable excuse for

her; while she sat by his side, with conscience-pricking thoughts of Roger, and thickly clad in an expensive "blanket" coat that Aaron had given her as a Christmas-box. Perhaps it was that the very depth of his love was already furnishing him with a vague premonition that, by the way of it, there were dire times in store for him; thus causing him those fits of gloomy suspicion which made him their prey now and then.

However it was, he enjoyed himself thoroughly that night, both at the Shelfords' generous board and when the usual games were played in the parlor later on. He was delighted at being the first to catch his handsome niece under the mistletoe, and laughingly told Dick that he could take his revenge with Barbara in the same way. It almost seemed as if he was determined to make up for his wife's rather noticeable lack of Christmas jollity. But the truth was that he had done no more than throw care behind him for the time being; while she, despite her having a fair amount of adaptability, could not keep her thoughts entirely from her desire to be quit of the merry-making, from the guilty secret that actuated her longing to be ministering to Roger, and the accusations of an unquietable conscience that told her she was already, in a way, an unfaithful wife.

On their way home, at about two o'clock in the morning and in rather worse weather than what had characterized the evening, he said:

"I don't think you enjoyed yourself very much to-night."

"Oh, yes, I did," Barbara answered at once, thinking only of the necessity of checking his thoughts from a certain direction, and moved to that instantly by the state of her own mind; but, as a proper modification of what she knew to be an untruth, she added immediately, "as much as I should in any house but our own"; "and," was the silent rider, "under present circumstances."

"Well, you didn't give me that impression."

"Perhaps not; but that doesn't alter the truth."

"An' I don't think any of the others thought so," Aaron concluded, with no effort or intention to be awkward or to raise any unpleasantness. He had found much enjoyment during the past six hours—except when Nazewick's sister repeatedly used a sharp knife in place of her fork at supper; when Dick's mother (who was something like her drowned husband had been) persisted in talking to him at such short range that her whisky-laden breath blew hot on his face; and when Elsie and Amabel "swaggered it" with cigarettes—and that mood was still upon him.

But Barbara felt no such effect. The night was dark exceedingly, with a bite of malignity in the weather; they were driving across the wind, with it on her side of the trap; there had been a pause at the start, owing to a kicking-strap buckle going wrong, and she shivered, in spite of the "blanket" coat and other wraps. In addition there were those other hurt-

ful thoughts in her mind, and she was anxious to reach home and know if Margaret had done everything properly for Roger. Therefore, with a touch of annoyance, she answered:

"I don't care what the others thought—even if they did think so. It would be a fine thing if I had to live to please them, wouldn't it?"

"I'm saying nothing about living to please them, or anybody; I'm only saying that you didn't seem to enjoy yourself,—that's all."

"Well, if I didn't, you did, anyway—enough for both of us, I should think."

"Oh, you're vexed at that bit of mistletoe business. Are you?" And he laughed lightly.

"Oh, dear, no, not I!" she replied, in quickly assumed indifference. "I shouldn't have cared if you'd kissed every woman there," came her conclusion, more truthful than she had meant it to be.

"Oh, is that how the wind blows?" he queried, in a changed tone.

"Well, it's only Christmas fun, isn't it? Do you think I'm silly enough to get jealous and make a fuss over nothing?"

"No, I don't, Barbara; but I think you might be a bit more Christmassy in your manner and words," he returned, rather admonitorily.

At this her better nature came to the front, and she replied, with some contrition and excuse, "I'm cold, Aaron, and I want to get home. I didn't want to spend Christmas away, either, as you know. The

first Christmas proper of my married life; and it *ought* to have been spent at home. But you will be so obstinate and have things *your* way. I know you mean well—we all know it; but that doesn't make things any the pleasanter. And if you had seen these things as I do, you wouldn't have been any merrier than I was, I'm sure."

"All right, then—I know I'm dense and thick-headed and stupid an' wilful an' awkward an' worse many a time when I ought to be a knowing sort of angel—we'll have our affair to-morrow night, if Roger's no worse. Boxing-day's as good as Christmas for that sort of thing," said he, suddenly anxious to make amends, now that he had enjoyed himself, had his way, and seen the harm done.

"But you can't have it to-morrow night," Barbara remarked, now more sad than annoyed, and giving him all credit for change of front.

"What for?"

"Because everybody's made their arrangements, and we should have it all to ourselves."

"I'd forgotten that," said he, in emphatic dolefulness.

"We shall have to do as you said, now—have it on New Year's Eve," she observed, beginning to find some lost pleasure in the thought that Roger might then be downstairs for an hour or two.

"M'm, so it seems. Hang it!" He pulled up sharply.

"What's the matter?"

"The strap's undone again. Take the reins."

She took them, and down he jumped to repair the broken buckle with another piece of string; while Barbara sat above, shivering, blaming herself for what she could not have avoided, wondering where it was all to end, and trying to make a resolution to keep more away from Roger in future and to curb the love that was ready to sacrifice her at any moment; yet immediately on alighting from the trap she hurried to Margaret—who was dosing in an armchair in the kitchen—to ask if all was well, then slipt quietly upstairs to ascertain that Roger slept in comfort, and was down again—her heart thumping, but her mind at peace in one way—ere Aaron entered from stabling the horse.

## CHAPTER XX

ON the forenoon of the last day in the old year Barbara was tidying Roger's room, ready for the arrival of Dr. Potton; up to Christmas nearly this had been her occupation as soon as breakfast was cleared away, but during the past week or so she had left it till Aaron was away from the house—not, in her heart, from any desire to be deceitful, but to avoid giving her husband further cause to suspect the truth.

Since Christmas Barbara had weighed up the pros and cons of the case with as complete exactness as her feminine nature and her place in the situation would allow; it had been a severe battle between love and reason; with now one then the other a temporary victor. But, in spite of some return of that tendency to walk in her sleep (happily so slight as yet that Aaron had not detected it, and in part because he was an uncommonly heavy sleeper), and of her secret admission that if there was nothing more than herself to consider she would readily have allowed love to be the permanent conqueror, the result had become an unwavering resolution to be faithful to Aaron in all things except in the bare fact of this love that would not be put down—to break her heart on the wheel of

duty, with the additional pain of knowing that in doing so she would break Roger's. A month of half-delirious joy, mixed with racking anxiety for Roger, and secret battles with a guilt-accusing conscience, had left her face-to-face with the tragic circumstances of the situation and the terrible possibilities with which it was fraught; and out of this latter fact had come new reasoning, and the determination that a right-about turn must now be made. It was with this decision and its concomitants in her mind that she moved in a deft and thoughtful manner about her task, saying presently:

"You will be downstairs to-night, I suppose."

"Yes, I hope so, anyway." He had been prepared for this possibility by sundry brief risings during the past five days, and was looking forward to so desirable a change. "It's pretty miserable lying here day after day; and if it hadn't been for you coming in now and then it would have been a thousand times worse," he added, after a pause, during which he had watched her movements, with hunger in his eyes.

"Perhaps so. But there's one thing we have to remember, Roger."

"What's that in particular?" he asked carelessly, for since the worst of his pain passed away, there had been a return of much of the even cheerfulness that characterized him up to the purchase of the schooner; the change being due, of course, to the knowledge that his love had been returned by Barbara.

Breaking the silence, in a low, impressive tone, she

replied: "We must be more careful, *very* careful of everything we do and say, or your father may suspect the truth." It was not in her intentionally to dampen his spirits, on that day especially, by saying that she *believed* they were already suspected.

"Well, I don't see that we've said anything or done anything to make anybody suspicious—at least not before anyone," said he in a change of tone and some surprise, and recollecting the feverish kisses which he had so often showered on her hands during the process of straightening his bedclothes.

"To your thinking, perhaps not. But you mustn't forget that you're not in his place. He doesn't see things as you or I may see them—as you would if you *were* him." Roger was silent, accused and convicted by his own knowledge of things; but only to such extent as was allowed by the resentment which naturally accompanied the growing conviction that he had been purposely robbed of Barbara. Warming, in a way, to the purpose in her mind, yet hating to cause the pain which she knew she was giving, Barbara added, "You know, we *must* remember that I'm your father's wife."

"My God, yes! I think of it all day and every day, more or less."

Knowing the meaning of Roger's words, the contrition that lay behind them; steeling her heart against the anguish of it all to him and herself, and still moving with quiet resolution about the work in hand, she said, after a pause: "We must think of him, of

the awfulness of him getting to know the truth. . . . We may pity ourselves; but we must pity him most. Because, you know, whatever his faults may be, he isn't to blame; and he is so very good in many ways—at any rate he has been so to us."

"Yes, I know; and I do pity him—as I pity you, and wish I'd never come home with the schooner! Whether he'd pity us or not, if he knew all, I don't know."

"Yes, he would, Roger. You mustn't say that."

"Not at first he wouldn't, anyway."

"No, perhaps not; but he would afterwards."

"It's a pity the bull didn't kill me!"

"And you mustn't say that either—it isn't like you. What we both have to do is to live it down; so bear up, like the man you have proved yourself to be—because, you know, nothing on earth can alter things now."

"No, I suppose not—unless it's something dreadful," he answered in his old tone of resignation.

"What do you mean?" she asked, a little startled, and looking around from her dusting.

"Well, if he was to die there'd be a change——"

"For shame, Roger!"

"I only mean in a natural way."

"You shouldn't suggest even that. And if he did, I should be the same in the eyes of the law."

"You wouldn't be his wife."

"No; but I should still be your stepmother."

He looked at her blankly for a few moments, his

head raised from the pillow; then he gasped, "Good heavens, yes! . . . But there'd be no relationship proper!"

"Yes, there would. Unless I married someone else, I should be your stepmother all the same. That's how I see it from the Prayer-book and that book of your father's, 'Everyman's Own Lawyer.' "

"What an idiotic law!"

It did not occur to him that there was anything queer in Barbara's ascertaining these points in the case; he was too full of the revelation for him to see anything else just then. She had looked the matter up merely in a spirit of serious curiosity that sprang from a sudden thought, and was telling him the result because that turn had come in their talk.

"Very likely," she answered presently; "but we have to face it as it is,—so it's useless to worry about it. We've both made a terrible mistake, and nothing can put it right. And even if there was nothing else to live it down for, we must do it for his sake—I'm going to, and you *must*. So don't worry about it, but get yourself calm—Dr. Potton will be here directly, and if your temperature's up, he won't let you go downstairs to-night. I'm going down now, and I'll send Margaret up with your beef-tea."

And, angry with herself at what the turns of thought and conversation had drawn from her, hurt to the point of tears because of the pain she had caused to him and herself, yet solaced a little by the knowledge that it was all for the best and needful

absolutely, also aware that if she wavered toward more kindness Roger would follow naturally, she went out of the room, leaving him back on the pillow and staring at the ceiling in a stupid manner.

Such was the beginning of the result of Barbara's five days' poignant struggle with herself. She had looked backward and forward, seen the inwardness of that small, under-working doubt at her becoming the wife of Aaron; the meaning of Roger's return home with the schooner and his subsequent gloominess and queer remarks; and, blaming herself for all the misery that had come out of her act—even while wishing to heaven that Roger had been emphatic enough to speak out in time—she was determined that, so far as she could rule things, there should be no worse trouble than what then existed, i. e., the bare fact of their mutual love. That could not be altered, was her reflection; but it was a brand that should not sear Aaron, so long as she could put prevention in its way. Daily Roger was needing less of the ministrations of anyone; he would soon be about again; therefore this was the time to begin that régime of heroic duty which Barbara now looked on as a duty merely, even though it cost her many a tear in secret, and many an addition to her daily prayers. As she said to herself, she must be strong where Roger would be weak—yet not too weak for his qualities generally still to make him lovable.

Happily, Barbara thought, since Christmas Aaron had recovered much of his former manner, and this

would help toward a general reestablishing of the old feeling and atmosphere in the house. But she was not aware that this alteration in Aaron was due solely to the change in herself as regarded her attendance on himself and upstairs; that he had, in fact, grown almost to believe that she had erred much on the side of excessive zeal for Roger. True to his eastern counties' natural secretiveness, especially under stress of feeling; moulded, despite his rather finer sensibilities in certain ways, largely of the characteristics of the people around him, and of his elementally physical environment, its limitations and influences, it was not in him to speak of his now sleeping suspicions. Even to hint to Barbara herself of this would have been too great a profanation of a sacred thing; for to him this love of so many years' growth under repression was truly sacred. With practically no thought as to whether to speak or not, he knew that he dared not make a mistake—as he might, if he spoke on suspicion. And even if there was some truth in what he had thought, he would still have been fearful of stirring a smouldering fire into devastating activity, of losing the last of that prize which was to him, religious man though he was to some extent, even more than his hope of heaven.

So the New Year's Eve party passed off pleasantly, at times hilariously enough. Roger had his two hours in it, for the most part as a cushioned spectator, who sat in a corner, outwardly amused, in his heart grieving again—because of Barbara's forenoon talk with

him—and eyeing her now and then in a way that made her leave the parlor as often as it became apparent to her excessive watchfulness. In fact his gaze was twice so intense in its nature that he did not, even with a smile, join the general hearty laugh when Margaret's Polly shrieked out "Stockings! Ha-ha-ha!" on a young man opening the door in "Postman's Knock" and asking "Who's there?" And again, at supper, when Polly cried the same instead of the usual "sugar," in answer to Amabel's asking her the common question, "What do you like best?" This was enough to stiffen up Barbara's resolution to play her new part with unbending exactness. Therefore, as soon as Roger was upstairs again, she, secretly to please Aaron and give a proper atmosphere to things, joined the gaiety with sufficient energy to give it a swing in places.

## CHAPTER XXI

ALL the same, however, much as Barbara succeeded in keeping Aaron's mind at peace respecting herself, there were times when her overburdened heart refused to bear its load in dry-eyed and lying silence, such as when Aaron and Sam, his most trusted man, armed only with stout, sharp-pointed sticks, went off with the bull to market, on a fine, sharp day early in January. This was in the forenoon, while Barbara was again tidying Roger's room for the day—he being allowed up only during the afternoon and part of the evening as yet. She was standing by the window, when Aaron and the man started on their journey to Rochford. She knew that in a way Aaron loved his *Pride of the Marshes*; that he looked on it as being an intergral part of the whole establishment, and was therefore feeling a heart-wrench at the parting. And, knowing that she had been so largely instrumental in forcing the animal to be sold, she turned away from the window, muttering, "What a misery it all is!" then left the room at once, wiping her eyes, and leaving Roger gazing after her, wondering at her action—as he had now grown to wonder at her resolute strength of mind, even at times to ask-

ing himself the riddle: "Does she love me, or was it put on because I was nearly dying?" Yet, much as Barbara's conduct puzzled him now and then, Roger knew that she was capable of anything on which her mind was definitely fixed.

With his youthful splendor now superseded by massiveness of build, and a rather aged expression on his face, mostly due to ill-temper, and chafing against the rope that impeded his movements by holding his head down to one leg, *Pride of the Marshes* went along, now in utter disrepute in all eyes but Aaron's. Again and again he tugged and tried to break the annoying tether, almost jerking himself off his feet at times, and occasionally standing stock-still, as if nothing on earth would move him on; while his wicked, comparatively small eyes savagely took in all things in front, and plainly declared what he would do if he could but free himself. On these occasions Aaron counselled patience to Sam, then put his big shoulder to one of the bull's hind-quarters, said, "Go on, *Pride*, my boy; it's our last journey together," and thrust him into motion again; or, if he still resisted, a gentle prod with the pointed stick set him going once more.

Thus, by a detour that kept them clear of houses, they slowly drew near the foreshore, when up the narrow road drove *Nazewick*, with *Fanny* at his side in the trap, in a red-knitted coat. The bull saw that hated color, halted, bellowed, and pawed the ground angrily with the foot of his free leg. *Nazewick* pulled up and shouted in alarm that rather hurried his slow

mode of speech. Fanny screamed. Sam called to them to turn about and go back; but Aaron cried:

"No! Let Fanny get out of sight behind the trap! Or, better still, take that coat off or lie down!"

In a moment she was down in the body of the vehicle; yet the bull would not budge; he only jerked at the restraining rope, pawed, bellowed the more and glared at the obstacle ahead. To make matters worse the horse began to rear in fright. Nazewick swore, haltingly, and tried to pull him around, but he resisted. Aaron sent Sam on to endeavor to lead the horse past. This failed also. Then he went himself, tied a handkerchief over the horse's eyes and tried again—in vain. So he and Sam forcibly turned horse and trap about, while Nazewick fumed on the subject of dangerous bulls on public highways, his gingery, wiry beard going up and down regularly in spite of the keen wind; and Fanny repeatedly asked, almost in hysterics, if the bull was coming.

When this was done Nazewick was afraid to drive on, lest the horse bolted, nor would he get out of the trap and lead it—no, he was not going to trust to his legs, while there was some safety up there. Hence Aaron, leaving Sam at the horse's head, returned to Pride, got his head the other way, and drove him to the adjacent gate of an empty meadow—all the time blaming Nazewick for his stubbornness and fear, and knowing that worse would be made of the happening. At the gateway Pride halted again, received a prod of the stick—not gentle this time, because of Aaron's

annoyed frame of mind—and tried to leap forward; in doing so he caught one horn against the upright end of the half-open gate, jerked his head violently the other way, lost his balance and rolled over—to be on his feet again in a moment free of the tether. Instantly Aaron drew the gate to its place. In jerking his head in the opposite direction the gate had dragged the knot of the rope off Pride's horn, and during the roll-over and the upward leap he had freed the other horn. Sending out a huge bellow to the clear, cold sky and all Foulness, and tossing his head, the bull turned and thundered across the meadow, the rope fast to his leg, and leaving his master at the gate, momentarily impotent and full of anger.

At the end of a minute or so Aaron had taken stock of the situation. This was Wallasea's field, therefore Pride must be secured and led forth without delay. Aaron went back to the trap, told what had occurred, and asked Fanny to lend him her red coat.

"If it's damaged, I'll buy you two," said he, eager for temporary possession.

"W'aat d'ye wa-ant it for?" inquired Nazewick, in astonishment and curiosity.

"To trap Pride. Will you lend it me, Fanny?" answered Aaron shortly.

"Se-ell it him, Fa-an"—two pounds; he's in a corner," drawled her father, feeling safe, now that his horse was quiet, and Pride was penned in.

But Fanny, who had her moments of generosity, rose to the occasion and handed out her coat, saying:

"If it's any good, I don't want you to pay for it, Mr. Rugwood."

"You come with me, Sam," said Aaron—heedless of Nazewick putting a price on the coat, if damage was done to it—and made for the gate again; while Nazewick turned about and drove slowly behind them, curious to see what this "aa-stound-in' Roog-wood" intended to do, and Fanny was all shivers both to see and to get away. At the gate Aaron folded and buttoned the red coat under his own, then added: "Now, Sam, keep with me, if you can, but look after yourself all the same, if Pride comes this way too soon—his dander's up; but he's got to come safely out of this meadow before I eat or sleep. If you're hurt, I'll pay for it; and I'll be hurt with you, ten to one."

"Oh, I'm notafeared," replied Sam.

"I know you're not. See that young tree lying up the hedge-side there?" Aaron pointed to a lopped trunk on the grass.

"Yes."

"Well, I want that on end; then you can make yourself scarce. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then."

Together they entered the gateway and ran to the big log; while the bull ramped up and down across a further corner of the field, near where, in the next meadow, some cattle were grazing; and Nazewick drove along the road to a safer distance, where he pulled up again, to watch how Pride was recaptured.

At the cost of all Aaron and Sam's strength the tree-trunk was raised on end. Then said the former:

"Hold it still a minute; and when I take it from you, clear off—through the hedge, there's a thin place—or anywhere out of the way."

With that he displayed the red coat and began to do all he could to attract the bull's attention, taking care not to go far from Sam. Presently his purpose was effective. Pride had seen the challenge and was making that way. Aaron ran to the tree-trunk, took it from Sam, at the same time holding the coat on the side toward the bull, and exclaiming: "Clear off!"

Sam sprang through the thin place in the hedge, guessing what his master intended to do and hoping that it would be a success. On came Pride, savage and bellowing, into the sharp, clear air, with the rope still around his leg; and, incidentally, Aaron thought of how the animal took his mind back to that sunny day in his own narrow meadow when Barbara's life was in danger. Soon he could almost feel the earth shake under the bull's tread, and wished that his pace was slower. Now he was well-nigh within reach. Aaron steadied the trunk, took aim, let it fall, and sprang yards aside, ready to scuttle through the hedge, or anywhere for immediate safety. Put Pride was down. The log had struck fairly between his horns, stunning him completely. Forward leapt Aaron and secured the end of the rope again about those murderous short horns, this time in a way that no jerk

would pull loose. Sam was there, with a compliment on the performance, before the hitching and knotting was finished. Then said Aaron:

"Go you back home, Sam, and bring Jenny at once, and two long pieces of rope. And," as the man was moving away, "don't say anything at home about this—just bring Jenny and the rope and be sharp."

Sam went—so did Nazewick (after Aaron had returned Fanny's undamaged coat, with thanks and the promise of a reward for its use, which Fanny said she did not want), to tell all whom he met how "that a-stound-in' Roog-wood ketched the bu-ull agen." When Aaron returned to Pride, the latter had regained his senses. Aaron helped him to his feet, talking to him as to a friend, and guided him on to the road once more; where they waited in the biting wind till Sam came back with Jenny, a young Dutch cow. Then Aaron took the rope, made traces of it from Jenny's neck to Pride's horns, slightly loosened his tether, and off they went, tandem-fashion, with no more trouble all the way to Rochford market. When Aaron returned home that night there was in his heart a new sadness that required weeks to wipe out; and an increased pain in Barbara's when she heard the full story of why Jenny had been fetched to lead Pride to the mainland.

In the evening of the following day Aaron again tackled seriously the subject of selling the schooner. He had done so at the beginning of the winter, in a non-pressing sort of way; when Roger had staved

the matter off by saying it was no use to sell at that time of the year, as such a transaction would be a dead sacrifice. Now and then between Roger's accident and Christmas Aaron had thought that, after all, it might be as well to keep the vessel; there was then such a possibility as his desiring urgently to see the back of Roger; and a return to the sea would appear to be natural, in addition to helping, perhaps, to avoid a scandal, which Aaron would do much to ward off his house and name. For to him there was a kind of horror in the thought only that such a thing should happen there, as he having to turn his own son out of the house for so deplorable a reason, "filling the scandal-mongers' mouths with more than they could chew in a month or digest in two," and making him wish that he had never been born. Now, however, matters were on a better footing than ever—with the exception of Barbara's settled seriousness, which Aaron ascribed to the same cause as before, and laughingly told her occasionally that she "mustn't take things so earnestly" or she would "be an old woman in no time." Therefore he could see no reason why the vessel should not be sold, and the money put to some paying concern. But again Roger said "No," in effect—she would fetch a much better price if he kept her till the beginning of the summer, then "painted her up," etc., and took her to one of the ports.

"Well, if you'll do that, all right," said his father, thinking that something definite was in sight at last.

"Yes—I think I'd better do that," Roger answered, rather uncertainly, and looked accidentally at Barbara; who divined what his thoughts were, but neither looked at him or Aaron, nor even appeared to heed what they were saying.

"Better? Yes, it seems so. But will you do it?" his father inquired rather testily.

"Yes, of course—that's what I mean," was Roger's reply, made as if he was surprised at Aaron's insistence.

"In that case, then, it *will* be all right."

And Aaron relit his pipe, sat back to read, but began presently to nod over his paper. Meanwhile Roger was content to let the schooner go, and so, in a way, fasten himself on the island, now that he knew how Barbara loved him; but her mind was in a tangle as to the wisdom of the proposed sale, Roger's half-ready acquiescence in it, and the upshot of it all. However, during the next week Roger got a longshoreman over from Burnham-on-Crouch and had the vessel somewhat tidied up with tar, paint, etc., and the cabin appointments and other matters attended to; which was repeated now and then, irregularly, till the summer came.

## CHAPTER XXII

EARLY March squalls, gales and alternating clear skies, its crocuses and daffodils, sparkling with infinitesimal particles of North Sea brine, were again in evidence when Roger once more found himself strong enough to resume his share of the general work of the two farms—which sometimes meant actual labor on the part of all concerned—and to go duck and snipe shooting again along the Crouch and the marshes. The varied greens of spring appeared once more. The increasing business of the time waxed day-by-day, and it proved to be the greatest lambing season that Aaron had experienced. The island put on a brighter look altogether, becoming more habitable. The seaward view was pleasant again under clearer skies and the growing warmth of the sun, and matters in Rugwood House were very much as they were when Aaron sold his *Pride of the Marshes* to satisfy Barbara.

During the interval Roger had twice tried to induce Barbara to resume that condition of things which had characterized their mutual dealings while he was confined to bed before Christmas; all to no use, however. Resolute in her purpose, she had told him briefly on each occasion that he must be content to

know that she loved him even as he loved her, for beyond that unalterable fact there should not be a single thing that would make her ashamed to look his father in the face at all times; and, if he could not live peaceably in the house, hiding his love as she hid hers, and so allowing the peace of the household to continue, she would, if it were necessary, leave it and hide herself in domestic service somewhere far away. Thus he had been compelled to carry himself with enough circumspection to prevent his father's suspicions from rising again, and to this there was added just as much cheerfulness as came naturally out of the knowledge that Barbara loved him, and him only in that sense. All the same he had his periods of dejectedness; for brooding was in his blood, as it was in his father's when under protracted stress of feeling.

But the great difference between father and son lay in the fact that ordinarily Aaron was genial, though vigorous and determined, on occasions even breezy and light in his manner, especially at "parties," when he was often the moving spirit of joviality—as was now expected of him by Dick and Amabel, who were about to give a supper in honor of the christening of their first child, a boy, to whom Aaron had stood godfather, wishing secretly that the same blessing had been vouchsafed to him and Barbara. It was on the evening before this gathering, while Aaron was away at a vestry meeting—he having been

made rector's churchwarden—that Roger, in one of his downcast moods, said to Barbara:

"I don't think I shall go yonder to-morrow night. It's all a farce to me."

"What, and Fred going to be there?" she asked in surprise. "You used to be such chums before he went away."

Fred Wallasea had just arrived home and "thought" he would stay there, much to his father's joy and Betty Churchend's delight; for already she and Fred were announced as likely to be married when the harvest was housed.

"Who said he is?"

"Betty did, yesterday."

"All the same, I don't think I shall go."

"Why, what on earth for?"

"Well, what's the good of it—to me, I mean?"

"Perhaps not much, perhaps a lot. But I should say, Roger, in any case you will be very foolish if you stay away," Barbara answered, with some quiet emphasis, as she looked up and across the room at him, from the fruit that she was cleaning for a cake to carry to the christening party.

"What for?"

"Because it will make everybody talk about you being away, and wonder why—"

"What does that matter?"

"It will matter a lot if you get gloomy again and everybody talks about it, and somebody hits on the

truth—as somebody may have already done in secret, for all we know."

Roger sat up, startled, as though such a possibility had never before occurred to him; nor had it, either, in the upheaving manner hinted at by Barbara; although there had been times when, thinking from the points of his own knowledge, his dejectedness, etc., he had wondered that the whole island did not know.

"Yes, you may look surprised," she concluded, resuming her work; "but it's one of the things we have to guard against, and one that would happen any day if we were both as headstrong—" She paused, not wishing to inflict pain by again reminding him of the fault which she had already been compelled to check so severely as to cause her own heart to ache.

"M'm, yes, it's a miserable, ghastly piece of business," said he, with a long, deep breath, as he settled back in the chair again.

"It's miserable enough, goodness knows; but it needn't be so ghastly, if only you'll stand up to it, as you used to stand up to things."

"Oh, I was never any good—and never will be now, it seems."

"Yes, you were—just as good as those that pushed and had a lot to say," Barbara contradicted emphatically, then added in a tone that grew softer and ended in a touch of sadness: "But you really do seem to have altered a lot, Roger. You know, you're hardly the same."

"I'm not the same at all."

"No, you're not; and not in the way you mean either. You were always ahead of all the others in kindness and honor and that; but this affair seems to have changed your very nature almost. . . . As if one could not love and go short and be the same—better, even." He was silent, knowing that he could not speak other than lamely against such an argument. For, in the days before she knew of his love, had he not talked on the same line? . . . "You don't know how much harder you make it both for you and me."

There was so near a sob with the last word that Roger jerked a glance at her, saw that tears were beginning to trickle down her cheeks, and said, in deep contrition:

"Barbara, I didn't mean it—I didn't! I—let me wipe them away!" Silently she pushed him back. "I don't mean it at any time; but—oh, it's so hard to be your best self always through it all! I'm sorry, deeply sorry, Barbara. Let me wipe them away—do."

He pressed forward gently, with handkerchief ready for the office he sought so greedily at heart; but she held him back with one hand, while with the other she dried her eyes on a corner of her apron, knowing from that one experience early in January that his wiping would immediately become kissing—at first the kisses of contrititious sympathy, then of loving assurance and care, and, finally, of passion, hot, impetuous, enfeebling, dangerous almost to the point

of eternally lost self-respect; to lead forthwith to another sort of contrition, while that primeval fire died down again in his eyes, when she reproached him for the burning liberty he had snatched so exhaustingly. No, Barbara would not give him a second opportunity to make her bitterly ashamed of her own weakness. He had to go back to his chair, begging forgiveness on all counts, and blaming himself sincerely for all the pain he had brought upon her. Presently he said:

"I think, after all, the best thing I can do is to fit out the schooner again and go to sea and stay away from here."

Barbara was silent for a minute; then she answered sorrowfully: "It's hard to say it, but I do think sometimes, Roger, that it would be the wisest step of all." He had spoken without much meaning, and with no real intention of acting on his own suggestion; so that her remark again pulled him into a state of alertness—to some extent it staggered him, so little was he aware that a woman could love a man to such a depth, as he knew she loved him, yet be ready to part from him indefinitely, perhaps forever. "It's a nightmare to me every now and then when I think of what would happen if your father knew, and at this rate it seems as if it's bound to come out sooner or later," she concluded in the same tone, and keeping her gaze fixed on the fruit she was stoning.

"M'm—it's a pity, then, that I promised him to

sell her at last," observed he, dropping back in his chair again.

"I don't see that that need stop you."

"P'r'aps not; but what would he say to it? What would he *think*?"

"I can't tell; but it certainly appears to me to be the smaller of the two evils."

Again he sat in silence, dismally conning over the suggestion; but more still he pondered on the fact that she had urged him to go. In a little while Barbara said she must go to the kitchen, and went; she had remembered that there were onions to prepare for supper, and if she relieved Margaret of the task it would account for the condition of her eyes. Thus Roger was left veering around to the subject which Barbara had so often put to him—considerateness for his father, to be followed by a fresh realization of the whole position, with special attention to Barbara's place in it; then of his own weakness, the criminality of it, till he felt a desire to go out and walk the lanes and fields again. But he curbed that telltale inclination and drifted back to the starting point and a half-resolve to fit out the schooner, thinking that the work done by the longshoreman was, providentially perhaps, a good help in the same direction.

## CHAPTER XXIII

THE upshot of the foregone conversation was that Roger accompanied his father and Barbara to the christening party. Of course, Nazewick was not there; for, although he still passed the time of day with Aaron, he could not so far forget his umbrage as to be one with him in a social gathering, especially at such an affair as "wetting the head" of the first fruit of the "stocking elopement," and in "Roogwood's fa-amily to boot."

Nor was Fanny there. Her absence, however, was not due to inclination, but to what she knew others thought to be due to herself in the matter. At bottom Fanny was of too forgiving a nature, despite her tendency to splenetic gossip, to absent herself from the christening. She was also too fond of "parties" to refuse anyone in fairly ordinary cases. Besides, the invitation had not come directly; it was conveyed —by word of mouth—rather as a rider to Harry, from Dick, who had called to him, a week before, to "come, and bring the family." Dick had thought that this would be enough invitation, and that a direct one might be resented by Fanny; who, on the contrary, felt that "if they had asked her to her face," she

really would have gone with Harry and her brother Chris.

The latter was Harry's elder, a tall, well set-up, sprucely attired, youngish man with the family colors in his face and eyes (ginger and blue), a large waxed moustache of the same hue as his father's beard, a weakness for sky-blue ties, and a strong liking for feminine company. His two chief characteristics were a habit of talking of friends who were apparently much higher up the social ladder than his own rung, and a tendency to the high handshake, that Fanny imported and tried feebly and vainly to make popular on her return home after the "stocking elopement." He was a bachelor, keeping a shop of some sort in Maldon, and was spending a holiday at his old home. With the exception of visits of two or three days each at long intervals, he had been away from the island since his tenth year, when most of the young men and women present were small children, and it was plain that he considered himself to be scarcely less important than the mother herself. On subsequent occasions whenever Churchend recited his account of the evening—which he usually did with some resentment to the subject of his discourse, as was but natural, seeing what happened afterward—he always spoke of Chris Nazewick as "A jay in a hen-roost," or "a blam'd peacock what's lost his tail and don't know it."

But there was one who held much more importance in the eyes of most of the company than *Mr.* Chris

Nazewick did, though he carried himself as of no account. This was Fred Wallasea, home from a rough-and-tumble seasaw about the world generally, on sea and land—from frightful rack and turmoil with the elements afloat, where deeds of comparative heroism were too common to be noticed, and went cheek-by-jowl with cowardice that shivered in secret, and with forms of depravity which only men know in lonely places; from less massive, less elemental, more subtle and foul hells on shore, where beings, who stood to each other as men and women, made human habitations worse than the elements rendered the high seas and scenes of desolation on shore; from the grandeur of racing safely before a gale, gazing from a mountain-top, and witnessing acts of great nobility in lowly corners; from the rottennesses and meannesses of humanity both in daily life and in dire straits.

What was more to the point, Fred had come home with some of it all fixed for life in his memory, in himself, as his three weeks at home had already proved to those who had heard him talk, tell of happenings and argue. Rather a dare-devil from the first, serious mostly, dark like his father, thickish-set, medium in height and quick to see things, he had passed through the mill and returned a finished man within his years and natural lights. Much was said by mutual friends as to how the sea had changed him, against the little alteration it had brought about in Roger—Aaron being one who noticed this with regret. To homely,

patient, waiting, good-hearted Betty, he had confessed that his coming back was chiefly because he loved her; and to see them now and then together, as they moved among the company, was a pleasure to the generous-minded, and a ripe subject for the splenetic. Barbara and Dick were discussing this matter, along with Amabel—who was as bouncing and bright as ever—when Bob and Elsie joined them and the conversation. A couple of minutes later Roger was passing the group, and, seizing his arm, Amabel whispered:

“Fetch Betty and her sweetheart over here.”

Thinking that some parlor-game was in the course of arrangement Roger did as he was requested. When the eight were grouped together in one corner of the big, low-ceilinged parlor (which Amabel had caused to be refurnished with up-to-date “saddle-bags in walnut” and contemporary pictures in fancy frames, in place of the old Spanish mahogany, oleographs and fine old prints), Amabel said mischievously:

“Look here, you two, we can’t have you looking ducks’-eyes at one another in corners to-night, you know. You have to join in everything—everybody has—everybody that can.” The culprits looked at her in mild surprise, but not in confusion, and Amabel added: “We were all just saying what a pair of turtle-doves you are.”

“Yes,” put in Dick laughingly, “you mustn’t be spendthrifts with it, you know. It’s got to last a long time yet.”

"Oh, you go to Putney, all the lot of you," answered Fred, and Betty nestled to him by way of reply, conspicuous in a big amber necklace, which he had brought home for her.

Most of the others made pertinent remarks jocularly; then Elsie observed generally:

"Do you remember that day we all spent at South-end, when Roger came home the second time? You know, there was Bob and me, and Dick here and Fanny; and you (Barbara) and Roger, and you two (Betty and Fred). Didn't we all pair off at the start, and went like a procession in twos——"

"Like so many young calves," interrupted Bob, in his usual tone of quiet irony.

"And how prophetic it was. Wasn't it?" she added, with a touch of her natural spleen; then immediately concluded, as she saw the changed expressions on the faces of Roger, Barbara, Dick, and Amabel: "In a way, I mean."

"Yes," Fred replied, in quiet force, "as most things in life are, it seems to me—half-and-half like."

"As the nigger said, when his wife presented him with twins, a black 'un an' a white 'un," interposed Churchend, who had drawn up behind Fred just in time to hear the last few words.

"Oh, father, you're really too bad!" Betty exclaimed and turned away, shocked at the underlying meaning of his joke, and followed by Fred; while most of the other six began to move away also, Dick and

Bob smiling, and the women wearing looks of reprobation.

"Well, it's a christenin'; so, surely, talk of babies is the right thing," the old man expostulated, and smiled; then added to Roger, the last to be going, "an' it's a big occasion. Isn't it? As Jack Roache said w'en his wife gave him triplets."

"You're wound up to-night, I think, Mr. Churchend," answered Roger good-humoredly, and walked across the room.

"Yes, me spring's all in order, an' I'm going to tick away merrily," was the response, made half to himself and the other half to anyone who heard him, as he pulled down the front of his "party" waistcoat, and went to find someone else at whom he could fire his jokes, with youthful heedlessness as to whether they were welcome or not.

Soon afterward there was a general summons to supper in the big kitchen, which was much the same kind of room as its fellow at Rugwood House, and for this occasion was lighted and furnished in a similar manner—by lamps from different parts of the house and by candles; two large tables, having been put together, and parlor chairs carried in by the guests. It was a huge board, loaded with the best of fare that the farm could produce, and supplemented by the result of a special journey that Dick and Amabel had made to Southend—all in spite of the fact that Dick was not prospering, because of ill-luck with his crops and cattle, and owing to heavy debts left by

his father. But this was not the time to show care, except in providing for the company, even if either Dick or Amabel had been persons to carry their troubles inwardly or outwardly. So they all prepared to seat themselves, noisily, according to inclination, chance, or with what partners they could secure severally, husband and wife sitting together as was their custom; when Amabel interrupted the proceedings, saying:

"Married people shouldn't sit with one another, everybody must have a change——"

"Well, change my nothin' for something good. I'll have Barbara, an' Aaron can sit with Mrs. Shelford" (Dick's mother), Churchend called out above the hub-bub.

Regardless of him Amabel told off this one and that one as pairs, merrily and readily, half-unwittingly giving pleasure here, dissatisfaction there, and causing demure in some places and open rebellion in others. Thus Roger found himself by the side of Lucinda, who was now engaged to be married, and had gone down specially for the christening and "a breath of sea air." Barbara sat with Dick, "in defiance of orders." Aaron had Mrs. Rushley for a partner, his "gentlemanliness" to the fore, and he rather quieter than what was his habit on such occasions, because of secretly regretting that Barbara had given him no excuse for such an affair; while Elsie, by a little conning, found herself with Chris Nazewick, rather to the annoyance of Bob, who had noticed that during

the past week or so she had shown too much preference for the "shopman's" company to please him. Fred and Betty sat together, flagrantly defiant toward opinion, expressed or silent, his dark, clean-shaven face full of masterly enjoyment, and her red one "like half a Dutch cheese in delight," said her father happily and proudly, when someone drew his attention to her.

Toward the end of the feast, when waistcoats had been unbuttoned brazenly at their bottoms, and feminine tongues began to confess that they could "go no more," when the clatter of table-gear and the confusion of voices were easing under the weight of satiety, Dick called on Aaron to make a speech, he being usually the one selected for such an office.

"Yes," said Churchend loudly, "you propose the baby's health, Aaron, me boy, an' I'll second it. No! I'll propose his mother's! Of course I will."

But Dick remarked to himself: "No, you won't—not if I can stop you," for he knew that if Churchend got onto his feet there would be blushing faces, cries of "Oh!" and subsequent complaints from Amabel "for allowing the silly old man to say such things," as had happened on a previous occasion at a neighbor's house.

So Aaron stood up and proceeded to edify, rather than to amuse, his listeners. He was not in his usual form. Still in the mood that had marked him during the preliminary fun in the parlor, he missed the genial sallies and all the naturally light features for which

his supper-speeches were famous locally. Two or three times he saw this, tried to better it, made a halting success, caused some laughter rather by a muddling of the point than by making it, and went on again as before, now in somewhat awkward silence, then striving to make headway against jokes and general merriment. With them as a whole it was scarcely so much a case of striving after happiness, as it was of doing the next thing that had to be done; of taking the pleasant bivouacs by the side of their road of life mainly as things that happened, and generally making them something more than pleasant during the short time they lasted. In a certain way Aaron knew this; he, Wallasea and the schoolmaster had discussed the subject in the old days; and, moral man though he always tried to be—not with uniform success—he made due allowance for their good-humored chaff at his seriousness, and presently sat down, not too well pleased with himself at having failed to "impress the table."

Immediately Aaron was in his chair again, up stood Churchend, and began: "Ladies an' gentlemen"; but the hubbub was too great for him to get any further. He waited, then recommenced: "Ladies an' gentlemen, as the man with a wart on his nose said——"

"Sit down!"

"Wait till you're called on!"

"Baa, baa!"

"Go an' nurse the baby!"

Were a few of the laughing interruptions that drowned the remainder of his words for a couple of minutes. It was plain that hardly anyone wanted to hear him, which made him, in good part, however, all the more determined to be heard. But his son Bob, at a signal from Dick, arose, went behind the old man and thrust him down into his chair again. All the same, he continued to talk, in spite of the racket made to render his words indistinct. Then, as with one mind, half a dozen of the younger ones at the table left their seats and trooped away to the parlor. This was taken as an excuse for a general movement in the same direction, and Churchend was left talking to the few men of about his own age.

Scarcely were the majority of the company gathered again in the other room, when Amabel's servant told her that "little Dickie was cryin' an' wouldn't be pacified." Instantly there were requests for him to be brought down; everybody wanted to see him; it was proper that he should be shown around; some of the clamorers said he was asking for his share of the fun. So down his mother fetched him, soothing him into some quietude as she reentered the room, with pride beaming from her big, bright, blue eyes. Betty was the first at her side, eagerly desiring to hold Dickie; but, as everyone would want to do the same, particularly to feel his rather abnormal weight, and as he was usually most peaceful in the servant's arms —she having already acquired some mysterious influence over him—Amabel handed him to her, so that

she could carry him around the admiring company, and him not be made to scream by being passed from one to another.

Thus the procession began, for Amabel moved along delightedly just behind the servant and her precious burden; who blinked his eyes in the unusual light, and several times made facial signs that he was about to break forth with his own peculiar comments on the performance, but was kept quiet by his bearer. Of course, the stock question was: "Isn't he like his father?" And the equally habitually feminine answer was: "Yes, *isn't* he!" While now and then a masculine reply would be more guarded, and contain some element of doubt. But no one ventured a direct negative till the trio reached Elsie and Chris Nazewick, who had again found chairs side-by-side. To the oft-repeated query Elsie rejoined indifferently:

"Well, yes, I suppose he is; but, then, they all are at first, aren't they?"

"Oh, I don't think so, Mrs. Churchend," said Amabel deprecatingly, who, not having been a girl with the others, always kept to the "Mrs.," except with Barbara and Betty. "Do you, Mr. Nazewick," she added, turning to the latter. "Look at him." Amabel drew the covering aside from her baby's face. "Now, don't you think he *is* like his father—very like him."

"No, I can't see he *is*—not a bit like him to me."

In a moment all those who sat or stood near enough to overhear the contradiction were all attention. It

was something to hear one who had the temerity to gainsay the mother herself; but it was more still to listen to the same in a community where denial of the pleasing supposition might be taken as an indirect imputation on the mother's honor. Amabel stood silent, hurt. Three female guests who were near by gathered close around; and the servant folded her charge to her breast and stood upright, hurt also—for she, too, being a young woman, was a prospective mother. Then, heedless of the fact that he had already "put his foot in it," the denier added, without any thought of evil:

"He's like his mother—a bit; but it seems to me there's somebody else in his face," and he began to twist one-half of his big moustache in the manner of one who had delivered final judgment on a profound matter.

Immediately there were cries of: "Oh!" "You don't mean it!" "It isn't right to say so!" and similar expostulations. Others gathered about the little group, some understanding the trouble, most of them asking what was wrong; and Churchend—then entering the parlor with his cronies—pushed his way through the little crowd, with an inappropriate joke on his tongue.

Amabel said to her servant, "Come away," and edged a passage through the guests, with tears near her eyes, for she had a soft heart. Then Dickie began to add to the hubbub.

Questions were asked quickly, answered the same,

and everybody knew what the trouble was; most of them blamed the denier, who declared that he had "meant nothing," in reply to those who pointed out what his words might be taken to have meant. Harry spoke up for his brother, saying he "knew nothing had been meant." Roger, desirous mostly of making peace, yet believing that the words carried nothing under their surface, was of the same opinion. His father suggested to him, in a half-whisper, that he should "take the family side, or come out of it"; but Roger disagreed with that idea, remained, and kept up the argument in favor of better understanding all around. Dick, anxious to smooth over the affair and carry the gathering through to a pleasant ending, accepted Chris's statement. Dickie was carried screaming back to bed. The usual games were begun and played till late in the night, with Amabel taking her share in all, yet not quite as she would have done had that particularly unfortunate remark not been made. Truth to tell, it had left an unpleasant effect on more than her; the general result being that in spite of various attempts to put vigor into the merriment, it flagged repeatedly. Churchend blamed the remark especially for losing him the half of a night's pleasure, nor did he fail to say as much now and then; and no two or three who left the house together but made it the subject of talk on their way home; while Elsie contrived to say privately to Chris at parting that she thought he had done quite right.

## CHAPTER XXIV

As the Rugwood trio walked homeward, Aaron did not say much on what had threatened to breed immediate mischief at the christening; and what little he said was more general than direct, such as—"he was very sorry for what had happened"; it was a thousand pities, for 'Bel was as touchy as she was good-hearted'; "it would have been better to have left the popinjay out," etc. Roger and Barbara knew from experience, and the former also from that slight conflict of opinion between him and his father during the hubbub, that the less they said in reply to his remarks the sooner would it all be mended so far as they were concerned. There was in Aaron's tone, and in his revertence to the subject, that which made his wife and son aware that more lay behind. The truth of the matter was that, while Aaron did not wish to raise what might be a too contentious discussion with Roger in Barbara's presence, he could not wholly leave it alone; but he got his opportunity early on the following day, when he and Roger were out together. The latter chanced to allude to the favor which Elsie had shown for Chris Nazewick's company, and his father replied, heedless of the point in Roger's remark:

"Whatever made you go siding with that fancy shopman last night?" In his tone there was some slight, renewed surprise, but nothing more.

"Siding? I don't call it siding to express an honest opinion," Roger answered, much as if the matter was of no moment.

"Honest be blowed in a thing like that!" Then, seeing that this was rather against his own ethics, he added hastily: "At least, you could have held your tongue, that is, instead of backing him up as you did."

"And what if worse trouble had come of it? I was trying to make peace, besides saying what I thought."

"Peace? Yes, that's all very well in a way," Aaron resumed testily. "But it was a family matter, man; and you should have remembered that, and not gone the other way."

Aaron knew that for some inexplicable reason he had taken a strong dislike to Chris Nazewick; also that to admit it would leave him open to attack on the ground that it ran counter to his usual line of talk and conduct.

"But surely a man may say what he thinks even at such a time, when it's honest and makes for a better end than the other would."

"I don't think a man should trouble about his own opinion in a matter of that sort. As I said, it's a family matter, and when it comes to that the family should hold together." Roger gave him a telling look of surprise. "I don't mean he should say what isn't

true; but he needn't speak up for the other side. Look at Barbara,—she could keep out of it."

"She's a woman."

"What do you mean?" came the sharp query; and Roger gazed, but little disturbed, at some cattle that stood under the northerly shade of hedge in a home-meadow swishing their tails at the tormenting flies.

Aaron was all the time losing patience; for it was still one of the peculiarities of his dealings with Roger that, while he could differ from and argue with others and usually show no touch of annoyance, he was generally and soon unpleasantly affected by the opposition of his son. Perhaps, probably in fact, the root of the matter lay in that old subject of dissension—the son's dissimilarity from his father. In addition, this affair had given Aaron considerable umbrage because of its "family" character. He repeated his question, and Roger answered:

"Ten to one she felt it the same as 'Bel did, only not so sharply."

"Of course, she did! *She* saw it as a family thing."

"No, I mean she saw it as a woman would—as she would if she was in the same place, only, as I said, not so sharp."

"I say she saw it the other way!"

"Well, she hasn't told *me* how she saw it. I'm only talking from a general standpoint; and——"

"And she hasn't told *me*, either; so I don't want your fling at that! But, all the same, *I know* how it

appealed to her," said Aaron, now showing some real anger.

"Imperturbably, however, Roger continued: "I've noticed that among women it's generally the case that a reflection on one, whether it's meant or not, is taken by them all as if it was meant for every one of 'em."

"I don't want your old man's saws about women,—a lot *you* know about 'em, anyway, I'll bet! *I'm* talking about *a woman*, as you was till you turned it off in that usual plod-plod way of yours,—always seeing some other point to bring into the discussion. You make me—— Well, there, upon my word I hardly know what to say to you sometimes! Get those calves seen to, and the sheep counted and ready for Rochford—they'll have to take the sands in less than an hour."

And off he went, heedless of having seen "some other point" himself, presently to be further annoyed and rather sorrowful at having "lost his temper like a weak man," then to feel both aggrieved and angry that his own son—his "one son"—should be the person who mostly disagreed with him, and made him show vexation at small matters. In his mind it was not a case of his disagreeing with the other, and this was the significant aspect of it all. Aaron might differ from the opinions of other men, but between him and Roger the "difference" was always on Roger's side, and particularly so since about a fortnight before Christmas. This tendency fluctuated according to whether or not he saw cause for jealousy in his son's

attitude toward Barbara, which in itself rose as Roger yielded to the pressure of his passion or to some chance relaxation on the part of Barbara, and fell again under the combined effect of her words and his own conscience. And during the early part of the summer he seemed to be passing through a time when he must be near her, or doing something for her, or receiving some favor at her hands; so that Aaron had much reason for a taciturnity that was well suppressed on the whole—suppressed mainly because, he told himself, he could see no sign of encouragement in her.

All the same, Barbara had her moments of weakness, which were mostly fought out at her bedside, or in the reflection that it was her duty, and that Aaron's qualities and virtues were the same as they had been when she saw in them sufficient attraction to make her become his wife. Yet the latter had changed to her, and she was aware of the fact, without any thought that but few virtues can bear up against the test of marriage, and remain the same to him or her who appraised them according to the glamourous valuation of love. Barbara was no pagan, no wife in designedly and determined revolt; she was not one who had been ruthlessly disillusioned by finding herself mated to something less than man, nor who had acquired "nerves" by the process of discovering that she had not married an impossible embodiment of masculine qualities. On the contrary, she was just an English young woman, full of physical health and passionate love; yet held back by her high sense of

duty, by her religion, and by the affection of one who knew that at heart she was a daughter, while in hard fact she was the wife of the same man. Of her class, time and circumstances, unprimed by inverted ideas that mostly act as rockets shot downward, it was not for her to do more—because she thought of nothing else—than to suffer and to serve in a purgatory, of which Roger now and then half thoughtlessly made a hell. And as her quietude grew or decreased, according to the changing state of things between her and Roger, so Aaron's moroseness waxed and waned; but, like some accumulative poisons, it always left a small addition to the original stock, making him disposed to be irritable and fault-finding where before he had been considerate. He was, however, too wise in his degree and had as yet too much command over himself and his suspicions to cause an open rupture by mentioning them, or even hinting that it might be better if Roger was out of the house. Thus the pot simmered, ready to boil up at any time over a little increased heat.

As to Roger, with the exception of odd times in which there was no particular remorse, during those glorious days toward the end of June, when the sea glistened under the sun and sent its cool breezes over the green, flat land, it almost seemed as if he had forgotten that the woman he loved was his father's wife. Apparently she no longer stood to him in the light of any relationship; his only impression being that, as she was already married, he could not claim

and take her in the sight of all the island. He would persist in returning again and again to the house, from whatever he happened to be superintending on the land or about the farmstead, and always with some excuse to speak to Barbara or to go where she was. Several times she warned him that this proceeding was unwise. But Roger, now half filled and ever seeking more requital of his passion, and unaware that his father was noticing things keenly, only smiled away her fears temporarily, coming as frequent as ever—heedless of the consequences to himself and half forgetful of what they might be to her, so be that he was near her—till, entering in an irritable mood and unexpectedly one afternoon, and finding Roger there (Barbara had just left the room, to go upstairs), Aaron blurted out:

“What the devil are you doin’ here again?”

“Again?” echoed Roger, blankly.

“Ay, again! Morning, noon an’ night you’re here. Seems as if there’s something in the place you can’t keep away from!”

“Seems to me you’ve got the hump and don’t know what to do with yourself,” Roger answered, turning away. “I should think the heat’s affecting you.”

“You go to your work and be a man an’ stop there, or take your vessel an’ go to sea again! I’ve had enough of your gloomy ways here, I can tell you!”

“Oh, if that’s what’s the matter I can keep away, don’t you fear; and I can go to sea again, too. It’s a jolly sight better there than here, with black looks

for everything," said Roger, halting at the doorway, in a sudden touch of anger, some of which was due to the pricking of his own conscience.

"Well, then, the best thing you can do is to go, an' don't be slack about it this time!" his father answered just as readily, in nowise surprised at Roger's manner and replies, because of certain differences of opinion that had been exchanged between them since early in the new year.

"I can do that—to-morrow, if you like!"

"Do it to-night, then you won't have time to sleep on it an' change your mind," came the stinging, satirical rejoinder that bit into the quick of Roger's soul.

"I'll not change my mind on this,—don't you think it; by God, I won't!"

In Roger's tone there was something so emphatic, so unusual, yet known to mean decision when it did come, that Aaron's anger was abruptly checked to some feeling of pity, and a little admiration at his son's suddenly becoming "a man"; and he replied, in quieter significance:

"All right, then. By God you have made the oath, and by God keep it."

For a few seconds they looked at each other, their eyes and faces conveying clearly enough what neither of them had ever before in anyway expressed to the other. It was a moment that would live forever in their memories, the halting-place on a long, long march, the starting-point of a new way. Then Barbara's footsteps were heard on the stairs; and father and son

turned quickly and went out of the house, each by a different doorway.

It happened that the tide was down—or was, rather, at a little more than half-flood; so that as Roger, on a young horse that had lately been added to the farm, took the sands within fifteen minutes of his leaving the house, he did the last mile with the water rising around the horse's fetlocks, and gained some idea of what it would be to ride across the tide in a gale of wind and rain during the night.

Supper-time came, but Roger was not there. Barbara—who had learnt nothing of what had occurred between him and his father—asked the latter if he had sent Roger to Wakering or elsewhere on business.

"No,—he's gone on his own affairs," replied Aaron somewhat moodily, without looking up from the newspaper which he had appeared to be reading during the past hour; while, in reality, his thoughts had been mostly on those hot words with his son and on this sudden action of the latter. The fact was that the way in which Roger had snapped up his invitation to leave the house was rather shaking his suspicions, and he was asking himself disturbedly if he had done the right thing, or was doing the young man a grievous injustice.

"P'r'aps we had better keep supper back, then, half-an-hour," she remarked.

"Yes, p'r'aps we had. . . ."

"Did he say anything about coming back, or being late, or anything?"

"No."

There was silence for a little while, Barbara seeing that Aaron was full of unpleasant thought. Then he said, still looking at the paper in his hands:

"I'm going to put him into Monkton Barn at once, an' to-morrow I'll drive him up to Southend to get the furniture."

Barbara gave him a glance so full of alarmed questioning that happily he did not see it; she followed it up by saying, with an unsuccessful effort to make her tone natural:

"He will want someone to look after him."

"Yes, an' he can have Margaret," Aaron answered, without noticing the forced note in her voice; and from that moment she knew what his suspicions were; but she could not be sure that they included her, and in that uncertainty lay an addition to the dread which she felt.

After again examining the matter from every point of view that he could see, Aaron had come finally to this conclusion, arguing with himself that if real harm was not already done, the doing of it was not far away, unless Barbara and Roger were separated. As to whether or not the feeling was mutual between them he could not be quite certain, or he would have acted differently, more drastically. Sufficient, he thought, for the time being was to put Roger into the other house, then to watch and be guided by events as they happened. He did not think that his son would go to sea again; that was "all bunkum," which would

be gone after a night's sleep. And, deep in his heart, it was Aaron's wish that it should be gone; for he had a sort of shame-faced feeling in the thought of Roger leaving farming again. In addition, there was still that occasionally dominating desire—not persistent now merely because of those upheaving suspicions—that the Rugwoods should wax fat and be ever to the fore on the island, even if they did not spread over it any further than now; and apparently this marriage with Barbara was not destined to increase the Rugwoods. No, on the whole he would be sorry if Roger went to sea any more; for which reason he would try to hurry up the sale of the schooner.

So they waited; yet Roger came not. Supper was served, and eaten almost in silence. Barbara attended to her last domestic affairs for the day, then went to bed; but, unhappily, not to sleep till long after Aaron was deep in oblivion at her side—and even then it was with an ankle tied to the other end of a long string from the bedpost, which she now regularly put into use whenever she had reason to fear a return to her old habit of sleep-walking, and for the secret restraint of which she was now and then exceedingly thankful. For if Aaron had again found her walking in her sleep, he would have known immediately that she was troubled deeply by something that was being kept from him.

## CHAPTER XXV

TOWARD tea-time on the following day Roger returned, stabled the horse, and went indoors, meeting Barbara near the foot of the stairs. Aaron was away in the fields.

"You didn't say anything yesterday about being away last night. What made you go off like that?" she asked, in a little surprise, but otherwise quite ordinarily; for it was not his habit, nor that of anyone else in the house, to do such a thing without previous arrangement.

As if he was heedless of what she said, he made for the steps, his rather tall figure—all so well-made but for the somewhat rounded shoulders—and dark face, with its exceptionally deep impression of kindness and sorrow, swept past her. It was like some of his actions toward her before he knew that she was aware of his love. After a night and day in suspense, in an instant Barbara was sure that a crisis had come. Aaron's words on the previous evening about Roger's immediate going to Monkton Barn; the latter's absence for twenty-four hours, his father's glum, determined manner all the day; and now this conclusive return home were more evidence than her senses required for proof.

Momentarily stung by his manner of passing her, she added, with dread and pain in voice and eyes:

"Roger, what's the matter?" . . . He was on the first step, with one hand on the balustrade. "Won't you speak to me?" came the next question, in such intense dismay and grief that he pulled up sharply on the step and turned about. "What *has* happened, Roger," she inquired in the same tone.

"This, I'm going out of this house to-day for the last time," he answered, quietly emphatic and in a manner that showed stress of feeling.

"You're doing what? Good Heaven! What has happened, then?"

"Only that father has told me to go."

"You've had some words, then?"

"Yes."

"When? Yesterday?"

"Yes."

"That was why you stayed away last night?"

"It was."

"Where—where did you stay?" It was the mothering instinct at work again: Had he been in a proper bed, or slept on the marshes?

"In Southend, at a hotel."

This was enough. Her thought leapt back to the trouble. "What did he say? What did you say?"

"I don't know particularly, except that he as good as said I couldn't be a man and keep away from the house."

"But he said more than that. Didn't he?" Barbara queried, with her heart in her mouth.

"Yes. He said I was always here, morning, noon and night; and I'd better go to sea again. I said I would; then he let out, in a way, that I wasn't man enough. But I'm going to show him I am."

"But didn't he—didn't he—" She looked toward the kitchen, where Margaret and Sarah were busy at their work, and where Aaron would enter when he came in to tea. A few seconds were spent in listening, interrupted by the parrot screeching, "Margaret, stockings, stockings! Ha-ha-ha!" Then Barbara asked in a lower, eager tone, looking fixedly at Roger as she spoke, "Didn't he say anything about us?"

"No," he replied, now freshly realizing what it all meant to her, and mentally lashing himself for his behavior at the outset.

"*Nothing?*"

"Not a word directly; but, of course, that was at the bottom of his temper and telling me to clear out—at least, I expect so."

"Do you think he knows everything?" asked she, almost in a whisper.

"I don't know what he knows or thinks; but he must know something. And for your sake I'm nearly afraid to think how much he's learnt. But, anyhow, here's an end now. I'm going to—"

"He said last night that you were to go to Monkton Barn at once."

"Did he?" At this there was a sudden touch of alertness in his manner.

"Yes; and he'd drive you to Southend to-day to get the furniture."

During the next half-minute Roger seemed to waver in something. The decision of his father's, coming subsequent to the quarrel, threw a new light abruptly on the situation. To him it spoke of relenting on the subject of his going; and if that were the case, then there could not be much, if any, knowledge of the mutual love between him and Barbara. For himself he cared nothing at the moment; but he was suddenly glad at the thought that she was apparently unsuspected; for if she were not he knew that his father would not tolerate him on the island.

"Did he say that plainly?" he queried in some doubt and anxiety.

"Yes, quite—just as I've said it."

"Then don't be afraid of what he knows." He explained why, coming off the step as he talked. His conclusion was, with an apparent effort that shook off the wavering, "All the same, now it's come to this, I'm going." He began to mount the stairs. "I've made up my mind, and I'm going to keep it. He sha'n't tell me twice that I can't be a man, as well as he can."

"But where are you going to?" inquired Barbara, keeping down the pain she felt now that the parting appeared to be inevitable and so near at hand.

"To sea." He paused again, turned half-around

and added, "I've ordered all I want for refitting the schooner, and I shall get a couple of hands from Burnham to help me."

"But you'll have to sleep and live somewhere till the work's done."

"I shall live aboard. I'm going now to get what I want till to-morrow; then I shall move all my things aboard, and say good-bye to Rugwood House——" He turned again and went upward, saying, "forever."

She watched him out of sight around the bend in the stairs, then, smothering a sigh, took her way to the kitchen; there she prepared him a basket of food, which was ready when he came down again, with a bag of clothing in his hand.

"But I don't see why you can't stay here while you get the vessel ready," said she, handing him the basket, again at the foot of the stairs, and adding briefly what the basket contained.

This was her touch of weakness at the last moment. And once more it was evident that he wavered. But he shook off the temptation, saying, as the parrot screamed his name, laughed, and added the usual word, then called loudly for sugar:

"No, I've sworn I won't sleep in this house any more—not while he's alive; and with God's help I won't." He was moving toward the front door, Barbara being close behind him. "You yourself have said it would be best if I went away,—now I'm going. He's said I can't keep away; but he'll see now." He

opened the door and passed out. "You can tell him, when he comes in—if you like—as I suppose you will, naturally."

"But you will see him again——"

"I don't know that I want to——"

"Roger, you mustn't talk like that. All this can't be helped. And if you do go away, and it is for the best, you mustn't go with anger in your heart. Think of how you would feel in his place." She stood on the edge of the verandah. He was making for the gate.

"Good-night," he said.

"Good-night. You will come to-morrow, I suppose."

"Not if I can help it."

"But your food. How are you going to live?"

"Get it from Burnham. I shall see you before I go. It will take me a week to get ready," and with the words he threw a backward glance at her.

As he unlatched the gate, she ran along the lawn, saying:

"Roger, what about the bedclothes and that?"

"They're all right, thanks. I've had them all aired during the past few days, as it happens. Good-night." And he passed out of sight behind the hedge, looking at her as he disappeared.

Barbara turned on her heel, drooped her head, and went on to the verandah; there to stand and take another look at the way he was going, before she returned indoors again. It had all happened so

quickly—not more than ten minutes had passed since they met at the foot of the stairs—that she barely yet realized the full import of the situation. Her first thought was: How dreary, how heart-aching the future was to be, without a daily sight of him, without the sound of his voice about the place. Oh, that she could leave it all, as he was doing, and go with him in his vessel! It was a fearful, a criminal thought, was the next reflection. She wiped away a tear while closing the door. Mechanically her steps were directed to the kitchen. The parrot saw her and cried, "Barb'ra, sugar, stockings! Ha-ha-ha!" It was a horrid bird, jerking her mind thus rudely from the sorrow at her heart. She did not recognize the service it did her in this, but turned again and went back to the parlor, now beginning to think once more that it was all for the best, that it was the only proper solution to the difficulty, and presently to admire Roger for the determination he was displaying.

Half-an-hour later Aaron entered. He had heard in the yard that Roger was back again, one of the men having seen the latter come, but had not observed him go away.

"Where's Roger?" was his first question, made with that unintentional force which the prospective unpleasant interview put into his voice and manner.

"Gone to his vessel," Barbara answered, without looking up from her occupation at the tea-table.

"Oh, what's he gone there for?"

"To live there till he gets it ready for sea." She

was exerting all her strength to treat the matter ordinarily, for anything tell-tale now would lead to disaster. There was a pause. Aaron gazed at her in bewilderment.

"To do what?" he asked slowly, puckering his strong brows.

"He says he's going to sea again, and he's going to stay on the vessel till it's ready," replied she, with a quiet evenness of tone in which there was a suggestion of reproach.

"The devil he is!" This was enough to prove how Aaron took the news; for he very rarely allowed himself to use such an expression in the house. . . . "Has he gone mad?" he added.

"He seems all right. He was here a few minutes, not long since, getting some clothes; and said you had told him to leave the house, and he's left it for—" In her nervousness she had knocked the milk-jug over, and was making exclamations on her "clumsiness."

"For what?"

"Forever, he says." Barbara felt a momentary touch of something like pleasure at this opportunity to retaliate in a way for Roger.

This was the greatest sudden shock that Aaron had experienced for many years; it held him speechless during some minutes. He looked this way and that but did not move from where he stood. In addition to its unexpectedness the news seemed to fling all his suspicions back in his face with mocking derision.

Sarah entered and put the teapot and hot-water jug in their places on the neatly-appointed tray, then returned to the kitchen to get a cloth for Barbara to wipe up the milk. . . . Scarcely conscious that the girl had been in the room, Aaron asked sharply, almost without knowing the import of what he said:

"Was he drunk?"

"Drunk?" echoed Barbara, giving him a look of militant reproach.

"Yes. For he must be either that or crazy."

"He's neither, any more than you are. And it's a nice thing to say of him, as I daresay you know."

"What—"

"He appears to be very determined, that's all I can see." Aaron swung around and was going toward the doorway. "Aren't you coming to tea?"

"No. I'm going to the schooner." And out he went, snatching a hat from its buck-horn peg as he passed through the hall, and leaving Barbara wondering anxiously what the upshot of this new move would be.

Had Aaron not been in such an absorbing hurry he would have saddled the young horse and ridden the mile and a half to where the schooner lay near the dilapidated little quay. As it was he had covered most of the distance, with big, forceful strides, when the urgent necessity to apply a large, flowered handkerchief to his face reminded him of the heat, his "comfortable weight" and the fact that he could have saved himself most of this exertion. All the same,

there was no abatement in his pace; so that he went up the gangway plank, puffing, carrying his hat in his hand, and wiping away the perspiration. As Roger was not in sight, Aaron dived into the stuffy little cabin,—half-sunken in the after-deck, and so low that he had to bend his head under the roof—had found him there, making himself some tea with the aid of a spirit-lamp.

"What in the name of goodness are you playing the silly fool for in this way?" he jerked out, then straightened himself up, bumped his head against a beam in the deck above, said, "Hang it!" and dropped on to a locker-seat.

"What do you mean?" Roger asked, with a quietude of voice and bearing that might have been taken for indifference.

"Mean? Why, this nonsense about going to sea again!"

"You told me to go——"

"Yes. But, confound it, man; is every word one says to be taken literally?"

"So I'm going."

"Then you'll be a bigger fool than I thought you was."

"P'r'aps. I've always been a good bit of a fool in your eyes."

"You're the most exasperatin' son a father ever had!"

"I know it—in your eyes. But I'm clearing out of it now."

"At least, you are sometimes."

"Don't minimize it now. It would be like cutting a lamb's tail off, then telling it it wasn't a lamb," said Roger, in the same easy, half-resentful manner that he had used from the outset, and had rather marked his previous talk with Barbara.

"Don't be an idiot!"

"I'm what you made me, mostly."

He poured the boiling water into the teapot, then went around the table, sat on the locker opposite to his father and proceeded to cut some bread-and-butter. Aaron gazed at him in silence, with angry impotence in his heart and face. There was so much that he could say, so much that had better be left unsaid, so many ways of tackling the problem before him—both in spirit and in physical fact—and so many ways of bungling it, that Aaron knew not where to start. At last he leaned forward and cried:

"Look here, are you going to persist in this rotten, silly business?"

"I'm going to sea."

"Going to the devil, you mean!"

"Likely enough."

"Are you going to take all I said seriously?"

"Didn't you say it seriously?" And with the quiet question Roger paused in his operations and turned on him a look that was equally self-possessed and searching.

Rather nonplussed, his father replied, "Well, at the moment I was! I was annoyed!" Roger resumed his

tea. "And a man's a right to say things to people that annoy him! What's more, I said no more than was right an' proper under the circumstances, though I did speak a bit hastily an' maybe a bit wrong."

"And would say the same again under the same circumstances?"

"Possibly!"

"Not to me you don't. Once telling to clear out is enough for me for life."

"Then you're going to take it like this?"

"I've taken it, and I'm going to keep it—as it was given."

"You won't listen to reason?"

"I'm going to sea."

"Go, then, and be damned!" And out of the cabin he lumbered, with his head down to clear the beams, and striking his left shoulder so badly against the jamb of the narrow doorway that the blow knocked him back again down the four steps to the little alleyway that led into the cabin, as Roger answered, still imperturbably:

"I shall be damned in any way, in your estimation; so I may as well have it where there's plenty of water to put the fire out."

Without another word Aaron regained the deck and hurried ashore and homeward—almost believing now that he had made a grievous mistake, yet too obstinate in general, too much a stickler for what he termed the rights of the head of the family, for him to surrender by an open avowal of what appeared to

be his error. The whole thing had turned out very differently from what he had thought it would. Despite all his desire to spread the family on Foulness, to make it in every way *the* family on the island, 'pride, honest belief in those "rights," together with what he considered to be righteous anger, barred completely the way to reconciliation. In fact, so great were these three dominating features of the case, that his disappointment in the "family" idea had not yet reached so far as to become pain. On his reentering the room where Barbara still sat, stung to the full with a tension that was not allowed to ruffle the surface, she asked :

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, and don't want to see him again," he replied, with defeat on his face.

But Barbara did not know that this was defeat only. Her upheaving question, which she dare not ask, yet must have answered in some way before she slept, was: Has anything been said on that subject? She rang for Sarah, ordered some fresh tea, then said:

"He is still determined, then?"

"Yes,—like a pig? So he can go to sea!"

No more was said on the matter. Plainly Aaron desired to leave it alone; and Barbara had heard enough for her to sleep that night without the dread of further trouble. Yet on retiring to rest she took care to secure the surreptitious string to her ankle.

## CHAPTER XXVI

ON the following day Roger rigged a sail to his small boat, went up to Burnham-on-Crouch, hired two 'longshoremen and a boy-cook, bought provisions, etc., and returned to begin the work of refitting his schooner. For the means to this end he had drawn from the bank all the money that his father had allowed him as his share of the farming during the past eighteen months.

As a natural consequence to this outbreak in the even tenor of things the news soon spread; in a small community that seized with avidity on every fresh piece of gossip nothing less could be expected, so that by the evening of the third day nearly all the inhabitants of the north end of the island had been to ascertain for themselves that Roger Rugwood was really going to sea again. But the subject of their inquisitiveness took small heed of them. Of course, Aaron's enemies had much to say on the affair, as he knew they would; and in his heart he blamed Roger all the more for it. To them it was proof positive that "the great man" couldn't get on even with his own son," while for the latter's qualities they had more commendation than would otherwise have fallen from their tongues, some of it being based on exaggerated

virtues which they had previously refused to recognize, because he was his father's son.

One of the first of Roger's callers, during the afternoon of the second day, was Fred Wallasea, whose interest in the refitting was quickly so apparent, lively and professional that Roger said:

"Wouldn't you like to come with me?"

"Wouldn't I, just!" was the answer, while Fred's dark eyes sparkled at the thought of returning again to the calling that he really loved.

"Why not come, then?" And Roger looked up at him from the rope he was splicing.

"I should like to see the coast a bit and the continent," Fred remarked half meditatively. "I suppose you'll be going across to France and Holland and there."

"Most likely—sure to, in fact."

Fred gazed aloft and about the decks, then observed, "She's not a bad-looking little packet."

"She's not; and, better still, she's a good sea-boat," Roger rejoined, with some pride in his eyes and tone.

"She looks like it.—Tell you what, I'll lend you a hand to get her ready." With the offer there was a very obvious pleasure.

"Thanks.—That's jolly good of you. These chaps aren't extra smart at the work, an' there's no go in 'em." Fred was still glancing admiringly from point to point of the vessel. "I could take you as mate, you know."

"Could you?" was the eager question.

"Yes. I will do, anyway, if you'll come."

"I'll see what Betty's got to say about it."

"And what about the old man?" asked Roger, suddenly remembering that Fred's father would probably object.

"Oh, well, of course, he won't like it," Fred replied, with a considerable change of tone. "But I think I can get round him, especially if I tell him it's only for a sort of summer-holiday,—an' we could settle the other afterwards," he concluded, more brightly.

"It's agreed, then. You'll come if you can?"

"I will,—hanged if I don't! There isn't much here to keep a fellow alive."

"That's a fact," commented Roger, his thoughts flying off to his private affairs.

Then they fell to talking of the work in hand, in which Fred at once began to take an energetic part and kept it up till the sun was sinking red and clear away over the mainland. After cleansing the tar from their hands, having "a sailor's sluice" in a pail, and a swim in the river, they supped together on the deck, and finally sat there, contented with the work done, and smoking and yarning till the great reddish-yellow moon came up in a haze on the sea, and Roger was grateful for the prospect of having one true friend with him in his return to a calling that he did not love.

But a cloud soon fell on this brightness. While he was at work during the next forenoon, Fred's father walked leisurely up the gangway, down the five-steps

ladder to the deck and along to where Roger sat on the after-hatch, overhauling a sail and putting in a few stitches here and there.

"So you're a-going to sea again, I hears, Roger," the little man began, as he halted at the nearer edge of the crumpled sail, crossed his hands behind him, and fixed those piercing dark eyes of his with a rather sinister look on Roger; while the great brim of the rush-hat on his head threw a shadow down to the black beard, making his face almost the hue of a mulatto's.

"Yes, Mr. Wallasea," was the cheerful reply, made without the least thought that this was no friendly call.

"And you've been persuadin' my Fred to go along with you?"

Now Roger did more than give his visitor a casual glance. In the manner with which this statement was made there was an expression that jerked Roger's faculties instantly to the truth that more and worse lay behind.

"I don't know that I've persuaded him, as you put it, Mr. Wallasea," said Roger firmly, yet conciliatory, while steadily returning the other's look. But for the fact that he was not given naturally to quick answers, his reply would have been more incriminating. He felt sure that this was "only the old man's way of putting it," and his purpose was not to throw the weight of the proposition on to Fred's shoulders, and at the same time to avert a rumpus if he could possibly do

so. He therefore added, "I think the idea was about mutual."

"Was it?" And the two words came like the deliberate taps of a small hammer, seeming to hit, with a reverberating effect, on the hot air of the still river.

"Yes. But, of course, I shall be glad to have Fred with me—a friend like he is, and all that," Roger said in a livelier way, that was meant to conciliate the old man further still by paying an honest compliment to his son, but it only gave him an opening, which he filled in with:

"Indeed. Well, let me tell you, Roger, if you persuades my Fred along with you you takes my hate as well."

"That's all right,—if no persuading will save me from it, I shall be saved," and he forced a smile to accompany the lightness of his words, all for the purpose of acting as oil on waters which appeared to be growing more and more troubled.

But Wallasea was not to be put off in such a manner. In the same, slow, emphatic way in which he had spoken from the first, still maintaining a short silence after each one of Roger's remarks, and with that boding glint in his eyes, he answered:

"Don't you prevaricate with me, Roger. I tells you, if you're the cause o' Fred a-going to sea again, I'll curse you, by God I will."

"God has nothing to do with curses, Mr. Wallasea," Roger said, now with so admonitory a voice that it

had some effect on the elder man. "If you curse me by Him I sha'n't fear, don't think it."

The additional remark was spoken a little more lightly, and was meant to ease the strain; but again Roger failed in his intention, for, after another brief pause, Wallasea replied:

"I says it agen,—an' I tell you plain, you're persuadin' my Fred away with you; an' if you takes him, you takes my curse."

Roger had no superstitions, either of the soil or the sea; nor was he hurt by the injustice of having all the blame put upon him. But this reiteration as to cursing brought him to his feet, the sail sliding off his knees, and he saying, with calm impressiveness—as one of his hired men came aft, curious as to what was going on by the after-hatch:

"Mr. Wallasea, so far, ever since I can remember, I've respected you. But when you come here, onto my vessel, which is my house, telling me that you'll curse me in the sight of the Almighty for something that's hardly worth talking about, you go a bit too far. If you wasn't Fred's father and a man, as I've said, that I've respected all my life, I'd bundle you ashore pretty quick. As it is, I ask you to go, and stop there till you can come here like the reasonable man I've mostly known you to be." Then he turned to the man. "Johnson, what do you want?" The other made an excuse for his presence aft. "Go for'ard and get on with your work."

The man went, and Roger again applied himself to

Wallasea, who only repeated, in the same quiet hard way, his promise to curse if Fred sailed in the schooner; but with it he took his slow way back to the river-bank, and Roger sat down once more to his work, more disturbed by the incident than he would have been willing to confess.

In the evening Fred came again, bringing Betty with him. From a piece of brown paper she brought an old horseshoe to view, and asked for it to be put up in some proper place. Laughing at her superstition, Fred nailed it to the after-side of the foremast, to keep the one company that was already there. Betty said that the other one should be thrown away, or it would spoil the luck of the one she had brought; but both Fred and Roger assured her that such an action would be thought the worst thing a sailor could do. So she said no more on the subject, yet believed in her opinion, all the same. Presently Roger got Fred apart and privately told him the nature of his father's visit; to which Fred replied that "the old man was cut up a bit, but he was coming round a little; and, as Betty offered no strong objection, he had decided to accept the offer of a berth."

"Don't go, Fred, unless your father's willing—to some extent at any rate," Roger cautioned.

"Oh, it'll be all right,—don't worry," remarked Fred, easily, and there the matter ended for the time being.

Now that her lover was to be one of the crew Betty showed considerable interest in the schooner and

her appointments generally, especially in the tiny berth that was to be his bedroom as mate. Her good-natured red face glowed with pleasure as she went from place to place, while Fred and Roger explained some of the mysteries of seafaring. When they left the vessel, for a walk before going home, Roger asked them to take a note to Barbara; it was merely a request to the latter to send all his belongings to the schooner, with a list of what the articles were; and, remembering that his father might be present and suspect the missive when it was delivered, Roger left it open. The result was that on the following evening —while Aaron was away on the mainland—Barbara, Betty and Fred, by mutual arrangement, drove up to the quay with Roger's effects. Now it was Barbara's turn to find new interest in the vessel, which was beginning to assume the little bravery of her tapering spars, taut lines, new paint, and a generally smarter appearance; but it was not for Barbara to show that evident delight which circumstances had allowed Betty to display. Her unhidden concern was forced to be that of a stepmother who was half a sister; yet the part had been so long played that it gave her small difficulty, much as she felt that this was a sort of farewell-visit—that he, whose mere presence in and about the house had made life tolerable to her, was now going away and leaving her to bear her misery unaided. While they were in the cabin, after having looked at the nautical instruments, etc., Betty drew Fred out on deck again, to explain something that she

had not grasped about the steering compass. Scarcely had they gone, when Barbara, fearing that such another chance opportunity would not occur, and having come to the conclusion that Roger's cheerful calmness was the result of a better frame of mind, said, in that low voice which the situation made necessary:

"You're convinced now that it's all for the best?"

"I'm convinced that there's nothing else to do," he replied similarly, shutting his sextant into its box and turning to put the box in a locker.

"But you won't go away hating your father and thinking that he's driven you to it?"

"No—not altogether. I shall go away knowing that you want me to, because—" He turned from the locker and stood looking at her.

She waited a moment, then asked, "Because what?"

"Because I begin to think, Barbara, that after all you only thought you loved me."

"Roger!" It was all that she could utter at the instant; but the suppressed tone in which the word was said conveyed more than a lengthy expostulation might have done. Yet it was so like a man, the average man, to rend, under such circumstances, the heart that ached for him with a pain that was well-nigh unbearable.

Presently she added: "This trouble has changed you dreadfully. But I won't believe you mean it—I can't. You'll be yourself again when you get away from here."

It was not in her mind then, as it was afterwards,

that she ought, if only for his sake ultimately, to have let him go away in the belief that what he had said was the truth. He broke the pause by saying, with some evident doubt:

"At any rate, you seem to me to love me a great deal less than you did, or you wouldn't——"

"Love you less!" she interrupted in a passionate semi-whisper, for still at the back of her thoughts there was the fear of being overheard. "Oh, how I could wish I did, in a way! But, no,—I don't, and can't. Heaven knows how much better it would be for all of us, if I did!" And she moved mechanically from where she had been standing by the little table, as if her intention was to go out of the cabin, her eyes showing that tears were ready to flow.

In an instant, regardless of hearing fresh voices outside, he was around the end of the table, striking one foot violently against the fixed leg of it in his eagerness to grasp her hand, and said:

"Barbara, forgive me! I didn't mean it. God knows I am changed, and I hate myself for it when I think of it. Forgive me, girl; and I'll——"

"Barbara, come here! Here's 'Bel and Dick and our Bob! They've come to supper, they say!"

It was Betty, with her head in the cabin doorway, and too full of pleased excitement to notice anything in the rather dim cabin.

Roger had dropped Barbara's hand. "You forgive me?" he concluded, with bated breath.

"Yes—everything." She was going into the little

alleyway, conscious under the stress that they must not linger there any longer.

"And it's good-bye now?" He whispered moving in her steps.

"Yes."

"We sha'n't get another chance, probably."

"No."

"Unless we——"

"We mustn't, Roger. Good-bye, and God's blessing go with you."

And she gave him a moment's look, with an expression in her eyes that was more than equal in its deep, strange light to that primal glow which filled his own. The next instant she had covered the four steps in the ladder and was on deck, he at her heels, to find the three newcomers walking up the gangway. True enough and merrily enough these had invited themselves to supper, on the spur of a chance suggestion made by Dick. So Roger set his spirit-lamp going, made coffee, called his boy-cook into service, and hunted out the edible contents of his pantry. The meal was eaten on deck, from a clean cloth spread on the after-hatch, to the accompaniment of many a laugh and many a joke; some of the latter being on Bob's grass-widowhood, as Elsie was staying with some friends up Maldon-way—rather to his discontent, because he knew that she was within touch of Chris Nazewick, and other flirtations during the time of the christening had led to "words" between him and her. Then they all got into the Rugwood trap

and drove way, leaving the still air of the night and the river ringing with the sallies of three of them—in the light of an almost full-moon, under which Aaron was then riding along the sands on the opposite side of the island—while Roger watched them away, feeling an obvious, unintentional irony in their gaiety.

Two hours afterwards he was pacing the little after-deck, smoking, listening incidentally to a nightingale in a clump of bushes on the west side of the river and to a screech-owl down by Monkton Barn on the other side. Times without number during the past five days he had gone over every point in the case, sometimes wishing that he had not been so hasty in responding to his father's challenge; but on the whole glad that he had done so, aware that he was only doing the right thing, determined to carry it through, pleased with himself at having so far maintained an even demeanor (such as his father would have termed "manly"), and was firm—when Barbara was not present—in the resolve to continue in the course to which he had turned at last. He was now treading the whole ground over again, stage-by-stage, down to the same end, the resolution; but it did not prevent him, when the ashes were knocked out of his final pipe on the rail, from going to the main-mast-head in order to take a lover's look—without a thought that Barbara was anything more than the woman he loved—at what the brilliant moonlight showed him to be the dark tiled-roof and surrounding elm trees of

Rugwood House. A gentle westerly wind was blowing from the mainland, across the Roach and over the island, on to a sea that appeared to be so smooth that it might have been an endless sheet of polished metal, with no dividing line between it and the sky, and jeweled here and there by the spot-like light of a passing vessel, the solid parts of which were undiscernible to the naked eye. It was a scene full of calm dignity, the soothing, impressive dignity of beautiful, still night; and Roger came down the ratlines with some of its influence in his heart.

## CHAPTER XXVII

THE next few days aboard the schooner went by without any incident of note happening, and Fred spent each one of them at work with Roger—telling him from day to day, as he heard things from Betty and others in the evenings, how their neighbors were gossiping on this going to sea again, and generally putting the cause of it down to Roger's father; whereat the son winced in his heart now and then.

Then came the evening of the day when all was finished—spars up, sails bent, running-gear mended or replaced, inside painting and outside cleaning and tarring done, and ballast got into the hold. Roger and Fred were standing on the little, old quay, looking at and talking of the vessel, after swinging her head down the river on the spring tide which the full moon had brought, and without which there would not have been sufficient water to turn her around, ready to put to sea in the early morning. The two foremast-hands had gone to Burnham for their effects. Presently Fred gave an energetic spring over the rail, announced that he was "off," and at once set about hurriedly making himself presentable to "shore company."

It was the night before sailing, the young seaman's

worst time of ordeal, when the hawser of affection is tautened out like a harp-string and threatens, up to the last moment, to hold its two craft together, till the lines and ropes on the quayside have all been cast adrift and the would-be severing packet will have to go away without him; it was the sailor's night of leave-taking, of farewells that have been said merrily times beyond count over aching hearts, and all the more poignant in this case because they were to be said in a stratum of life where healthy sentiment still had its abiding place.

And Roger was just a little apprehensive that Betty might change her mind in the hour of parting, or that "old man Wallasea" would persuade her to exert her influence to keep Fred back; at the same time he had much hope that they would get away comfortably, because Fred had already conveyed his clothing, etc., on board, and the father seemed to have resigned himself to the change since his effort (honest and purposeful on his part) to scare Roger out of taking Fred with him. At least the latter was the case so far as Roger had heard from Fred, Betty and other visitors to the schooner; for he had not been a hundred yards away from her since he went to Burnham and hired the two men and the boy-cook, neither had his father been near him again or made any inquiries about him. Truth to tell, by sheer force of will, a reapplication of that pride whereof he had a little to spare, and by the growing belief that Roger's leaning to Barbara was only the indis-

creetly exhibited affection of a relative, Aaron had conducted himself during the interval as though nothing had happened out of the ordinary course of things—except for his keeping away from the schooner, which was meant as an action directed only at Roger, in return for the latter's avowed intention of not entering Rugwood House any more.

So Fred sprang ashore again, said he would "not be very late," and went whistling along the road toward Monkton Barn. Roger watched him away, without envy, in spite of feeling curiously lonely and cut off alike from "good-bye parties" and single farewells. He was but a young man as yet, one in whose heart there was now a far greater desire for home-life than there had ever been of the real lust of wandering. There was no especial place for *him* to seek on this last evening ashore, no house to which *he* was unconditionally welcome, no one who would linger with *him* till the last minute, then be as loth to part from him as from a certain hope of heaven. Still there were those who would like to say good-bye to him; but he further reflected, his place, under the circumstances, was on board, where friends might come to say their good-byes. In this frame of mind he walked meditatively to and fro a while on the river-bank, thinking mostly of what there was immediately before him; then he leaned against a post, until a fine blackbird came running along at the head of a couple of fledglings, to feed whose gaping mouths he stopped repeatedly to find worm or grub. Their size

and the hue of their feathers proclaimed them to be old enough to fend for themselves; but Roger saw nothing of this. It was the parting-hour, a glorious evening withal, and he had no one with whom to part. All that he observed in the birds was the sentiment that lay behind their action—it was the familytie, the fathering instinct, the sense of affection. It jerked him back face-to-face with his loneliness and a recapitulation of the whole case as it affected him and Barbara. This was done while pacing the quay; then he went aboard and into the cabin, where a little while was spent in rummaging for something. When he stepped onto the deck again, he saw his father standing on the quay, just above him on his left, and looking from point to point of the vessel. For a couple of minutes Roger felt considerably embarrassed; this was largely the outcome of all those years of trained submission, but it gave way to the newer feeling of resentment that had grown in him during the past six months, along with the idea that he had been robbed deliberately of Barbara. He threw a purposely casual glance up at his father, as the latter's gaze came quite ordinarily in his direction.

"Well, are you about ready, then?" came the query, as if there was no more between them than what a chance observer could have seen in so common a remark.

"Yes," Roger answered, determined to do as he was done by, feeling greatly relieved by the manner of the question, and wondering how on earth he would

have opened conversation had the initiative been left to him.

"I hear you go away in the morning."

"Yes. We sail with the morning-tide."

Aaron had come to say farewell, and this without a word to Barbara of his action. He was not one to let his son—his "one son"—go away on the wild seas without a good-bye that should be "farewell"; even though he considered quite genuinely that the going away was crass stupidity on the son's part, and that *he* was in nowise to blame for the foolishness. He could not brook the idea of allowing his neighbors to say to him: "You let your own son go away without a father's word." As to telling his wife of the errand—that would be all right when the errand proved successful; for Aaron had his own measure of how far he ought to bend under the circumstances.

He glanced at the boy-cook, sitting on an upturned pail by the landward-door of his little caboose amidships, and reading a greasy, pocket-marked "penny dreadful."

"Will you come on shore a few minutes?" he asked of Roger.

"Yes."

He went up the ladder. Aaron turned, and they walked slowly along the quay together. Intuitively Roger knew that his father had a particular desire to meet him on neutral ground; and this was true, for Aaron was determined not to board the schooner till his son had "taken back that silly vow not to enter

the house." As they passed on to the end of the roadway, he said:

"Don't you think it's playing a fool's game to go away as you're doing?"

"No, I don't."

"Why?" And he stepped up to the gate, where Roger had previously stood, placed his back against it, his elbows on the top, and looked at his son with a mixture of pity, masterliness and would-be reconciliation.

"Because I don't—that's all," was the quiet yet firm reply. . . . "You told me to keep away from the house or go to sea; you said I couldn't, and this is my answer."

"We've gone over that ground already."

"I know we have, and it's there again—as you ask for it."

For half-a-minute they looked straight into each other's eyes. Then Aaron inquired, on a sudden thought:

"Is there nothing else driving you to this?"

"Nothing," came the immediate rejoinder, along with the unspoken thought that his love for Barbara had not "driven" him to it, while he also recognized that the denial was a half-truth, but would have maintained that the circumstances allowed for no other reply.

"Nothing?"

"No, nothing. And if this is all you've come up here to talk about, I think you might as well have

stayed at home." And Roger turned as if to move away.

"Aren't you a bit too fond of Barbara?" The question, not in Aaron's mind as he came to the interview, was said without a moment's thought and regretted the next instant.

"No—no fonder than I ought to be—than all these years have made me," Roger replied turning again, hiding the start he had received by the abruptness of the query, and realizing how careful it was necessary to be for Barbara's sake, yet disliking to deny the truth and feeling that he would rather prefer to have the whole matter out now that it had been directly touched upon. Just as steadily as his father looked at him he returned the gaze, while the idea arose in his mind again of Barbara having been purposely taken from him. In a sense, as in the heights of his passion, he did not think of her as his father's wife; but as the one he loved, and who must be protected at all costs. At length he asked:

"You don't think I'm wood, do you?"

"Well, I forgive you," Aaron interrupted, dropping his arms from the gate, taking a step forward, and meaning the statement to apply generally to the whole case as he knew it.

"There's nothing to forgive," answered the son rather too readily, in his anxiety for Barbara; then added quickly, "Nothing but what the Lord himself would forgive beforehand."

"Beforehand?" And Aaron halted, flashing a

deeper questioning glance at Roger; whose thoughts were running on *the* subject, while his father's had gone off partially to other things.

"Ay, beforehand; because there's no more harm done than what He ordained. And, except for the misery of it all—"

"Misery! There is misery in it then?"

"Only what comes of the way you look at things." Roger saw that he had gone too far, was sorry for it, but stood his ground.

Aaron took the answer as an accusing contradiction to his suspicions, and walked on to the middle of the road, saying:

"All right, we'll let bye-gones be bye-gones. What I want to know is this: Are you going to persist in this goin' to sea again?"

"Yes, I am."

"But do you mean to stick to it, I mean? Because you'll have to settle to one thing—farming or sailing. And you know well enough that I wanted you to take my place some day."

"I don't know—not at present, anyway," said Roger, feeling some regret that this dear wish of his father's heart was not to be gratified—at least not to the full. "I think we'd better wait till the end of the summer, then see—now things have gone so far," he concluded in a quieter tone, in which there was a touch of sorrow.

"You mean you may sell the vessel then?"

"Yes. I hope I shall."

"An' I do. Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye."

They shook hands, outwardly as two ordinary friends would. Aaron turned and began his walk home, thinking presently of those words, "no more harm done than what He ordained," but not so deeply as he was to think of them in the near future. Roger stood where they had parted, wondering if he could not have directed the conversation so as to have gone down to the house and said farewell again to Barbara. Once more he went across to the gate, rested on it with one bent arm, and watched his father out of sight, knowing that if he were to see her at the moment of going, a smile from her would make him jump ashore and let the schooner go. Presently he happened to look down at a bald-headed house-sparrow—up from Monkton Barn, probably, in search of what scraps of bread the boy threw ashore. It was pecking at something on the edge of the road, a few yards away, giving Roger a knowing side-glance now and then, and curiously suggesting an elfish, preternaturally wise, old Franciscan monk with his brown cowl thrown back, and the black chest of his under-frock showing like a bib. "You're happier than I am, you funny-looking little beggar," said Roger, and went aboard. But whatever he did during the next hour, and off and on till he fell asleep, he could not quite rid his mind of the look of the sparrow, coming as it had done in the midst of his thoughts and desires concerning Barbara and another good-bye-meeting.

Before nightfall Dick, Amabel and others had called to say farewell and wish good luck to the venture. Fred was true to his word about not being "*very late*," and soon afterwards Roger was the only one aboard who heard the occasional note of a night-bird over the still, moonlit river and marshes.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE was a fine opal color, pinky-warm away to seaward, when Roger stepped, bare-footed, on deck an hour after daybreak on the following morning. A glance at the river-bank was enough to show him that the tide was sufficiently high for him to be getting under way. Immediately he roused out his crew, told the boy to make coffee, and was soon back on deck, ready for the long day's work—yet, at the back of his mind, half-wishful that something would happen to prevent them from going.

The ropes were cast off; the two foremast-hands went ahead in a small boat and towed the schooner into midstream; there a little head-canvas and the peak of the mainsail were hoisted to a light westerly wind that caught the vessel on her beam and presently gave her steering-way.

Here, already, it was easy to see the difference between the master and his mate. While Roger took everything calmly, Fred was all bustle and enthusiasm. This was especially the case when, after coffee had been served out, the schooner, under a slight increase of sail, turned into the broader, deeper waters of the Crouch, with her head seaward. Then it was a case of more canvas quickly, with Roger at the wheel, and

Fred hurrying the two men and the boy from task to task, he working like a Trojan with them. In a short space of time the *Barwood* was slipping through smooth water, under all the sail she could spread; and the young mate, pleased with his position and her movement, was full of verve and talk of what she would do under given circumstances—it was a pity, he remarked, for her to have been laid-up there in that muddy river so long. Meanwhile Roger looked back now and then to where the inhabitants of Rugwood House were still asleep.

Hull was their first port of call, where an agent—appointed by Roger when he first began to fit-out—had secured them a cargo for Harlingen; and the run to the Humber was satisfactorily smart. There the two Burnham 'longshoremen were paid off, to return home; a couple of regular coasting A. B.'s were shipped in their place. The cargo was taken in, and in due time the *Barwood* arrived in the North Dutch port, where another load awaited her, this time for Rochester. There Fred proceeded heartily, on the first evening ashore, to purchase nicknacks for Betty, thereby causing Roger to feel that here was another legitimate pleasure of which he had been robbed—a pleasure that is peculiar to, and deeply enjoyed by, young seamen the world over. And if Roger was not a sailor at heart, he was, at least, one in the matter of desiring to carry home foreign souvenirs for Barbara.

But Roger's attentions were soon absorbed by the

work in hand. His agent wrote to him to use all despatch in reaching the Medway, where he was to load again for Harlingen. Fred was delighted, and said he had brought good luck to the schooner—or Betty had with her horse-shoe; and Roger began to think it was so, especially when, as the last parcels of the new cargo were being shipped, a dapper little man with Hebrew features, a fierce looking moustache, an "imperial," and fashionably dressed leapt lightly on board, near where Roger was standing, and asked for the captain. Roger stepped forward and quickly learned that the man wanted him to take some goods to London. The stranger—posing as a Frenchman—talked persuasively, without mentioning the weight or nature of his proposed consignment.

"I'm sorry, but I can't take it," said Roger. "This cargo is light, and there won't be room for anything in the hold. We're having a job to get it all in."

"Oh, you can put my leetle lot on deck here."

"How much is there of it?"

"Two tons—about. And *the* marechant offers two pounds a ton."

In his surprise Roger nearly echoed the price; but he checked himself and asked: "What is it."

"Oh, salt—a cheemical salt, that is all. And it is in small cases. You can handle it vera easily."

Roger hesitated. Made slightly suspicious by the offer of £2 a ton, he also now began to think that a deck-load might be in the way of working the schooner. The little man returned to his subject,

showing some anxiety as Roger remained undecided.

"Why don't you send it to Amsterdam and put it into one of the regular steamers?" he asked.

"All too full—too full for weeks. Trade good, you know—all *the* Dutch ports full of cargo."

Fred, without coat or waistcoat, passed them, to look down the hatchway, moping his face and neck in the heat and exertion; for where work was there, too, was the sturdy young mate, his dark face full of energy and glow—ideal in his place, except for a little too much "drive" where labor was in hand. Roger drew his attention to the offer, and added:

"What do you think of it?"

"Think? I should take it, of course!" Then he turned sharply to the dapper stranger, his bare, sunburnt, hairy arms, open shirt-breast, and tightly knitted frame—rather under the medium height—striking a vivid contrast to the other's fine appearance. "What is it?" inquired he, darting a look from under his big, slouch and dilapidated rush hat first at the French Jew's expensive "Panama" then into his blue eyes.

"Oh, salt—shjust a kind of salt. A leetle less, perhaps a leetle more than two tons," was the slow answer accompanied by a shrug of his shoulders, while the speaker recognized instantly that here he had a very different personality with which to deal.

"Make it a five-pound note," Fred suggested at the spur of a sudden thought.

"All right," came the fairly ready answer, but not

so ready as to make Fred think that he could spring the price higher still. In that exchange of glances the astute landsman had measured off the equally intelligent though less crafty sailor.

Fred turned to Roger, asking: "What do *you* say? It's good enough, I think."

"Yes. But there's the stowage."

"Stowage be blowed, man! I'll put it into our bunks, if it comes to that, and sleep on deck!"

"Well, all right, then," said Roger, then added to the stranger: "We'll take it."

So the matter was settled; and, after particularly impressing on the Englishman that the "salt" was to be kept dry, he went away to have the unexpected consignment sent on board at once. When it arrived, in two covered vans, it proved to be in small cases of about a hundredweight each. By that time the cargo proper was below, and the hatches were battened down. With very little ado Fred at once began to stow the cases on and around the main-hatch. But the phlegmatic Hollanders were too slow for his liking; so he sent the two A.B.'s to the work of preparing for sea, leaving the carters to stack their cases on the edge of the quay for the present, except for what he took aboard single-handed. This, however, did not suit the man who had come in charge of the "salt." He could not speak English; but he soon made Fred understand that the cases must be taken from his men and packed straight away and covered up or a tarpaulin must be put over them on the quay. Fred

was for paying no heed to "the silly, fat wooden-shoes"; but the other refused to "carry on," in proof of which he had the two cases put back into the wagons, then seated himself on a bollard, lit a cigar and became stolid and wordless.

Against such tactics as these the Englishman's energy was useless, much as he vehemently pointed out to "Dutchy" that the latter ought to be thrown into the harbor for interfering in such a senseless way with British despatch of business. Annoyed at being thus prevented from pushing on with the work, Fred was calling his men back, when the dapper "imperialist" returned, and explanations were tried. All to the same end, however—Fred might make himself black in the face by pointing to the cloudless blue sky, saying that "the 'glass' was up to he didn't know where"; vowing that there would be no rain for a month to come; and demonstrating how time would be saved, and needful work done aboard the schooner, by stacking the cases on the quay till he and his men could "whip 'em aboard." The dandy said, "No—they would have to be taken from the carters, one by one, and stowed away; that was the rule of the harbor authorities concerning 'cheemical salt.'" What was more, as the first necessity was to keep water from the cases, he would advise that those boxes on the deck, around the hatch-combings, be lifted on to the hatch itself.

"Because, you zee," he added, and smiled deprecat-

ingly, "a leetle vatair through *the* scooppairs at zea,  
or when you vash ze decks in ze morn——"

"All right, I see!" cried Fred, then called his two hands and sprang at the work, feeling further annoyed at this detection of a ship-board fault by a person of the Jew's kind, and blaming the "salt" for being "as much against water as a nigger's against soap." Truth to tell, forgetful of the stipulation that the consignment was to be kept dry, he had packed some of the cases on deck, for the double purpose of keeping the heap well under the foresail-boom, and of being able to rope the whole together with the hatch-combings in the middle, thus preventing the pile from shifting its position at sea.

At length the work was completed, tarpaulins being lashed over the pile, which was secured to ring-bolts in the deck around the hatch. Roger returned from the customs house, with his clearance papers. The dandy handed him his bill of lading, together with an order for £5 on delivery of the forty-five cases of "salt"; everything was in readiness. So the lines were cast off; the *Barwood* was towed out to an offing, all her canvas spread; then, with a pleasant north-easterly breeze dead astern, Roger ran her down to the passage between Helder and the Texel, got her safely through into the North Sea, and by nightfall he squared her away for the Thames. Fred was full of high glee, as he took charge of the first watch. That horse-shoe must have some magic in it, he said laughingly to Roger; who was now just as pleased, but

in a quieter way. If the wind held they would be in Rochester for Saturday night—this was Thursday evening—and, as the steamer was running between Southend and Rochester, Betty could be with them on the Monday. Roger smiled, told him not to reckon his chickens before they were hatched; and, above all, not to "carry-on" if the breeze freshened, but to reduce canvas according to the wind; then he went below, tapped the face of his barometer, and turned-in.

To their great satisfaction the wind did hold till the second morning, when it veered to the south-east and brought rain, much to Fred's expressed annoyance; for, although the wind was still fair to them, there was less of it, and Fred was anxious lest it should drop away entirely. While he swore now and then, and kept close observation on every clew and tack during his watch, in order to get the utmost pull out of every sail; Roger went unmoved, beyond the ordinary desire to make a short passage, and, finally a success of the whole venture.

All that day there was a steady drizzle. In the afternoon the weather had become so thick that, as they were nearing the entrance to the Channel, Roger kept a sharp look-out under the lee, from a position on the lee-side of the raised cabin; leaving the A.B., who was at the wheel, to do the same over the weather-bow and to windward. Suddenly, and from where Roger knew not at the moment, there was a loud explosion. The helmsman gave a shout of dismay. Roger sprang around the after-end of the cabin, think-

ing the man was hurt; but the latter cried, pointing forward excitedly:

"The salt! The salt! It's on fire!"

Roger glanced ahead, saw that the tarpaulin over the pile on the main hatch was ripped to shreds at the port-after corner, where flames were issuing. Past the cabin he ran, tore the tarpaulin further away, and discovered that the flames were coming out of the top case at the corner. It was on a level with his shoulder, and, without a moment's pause he lifted the box, ran to the lee-rail (the fore-boom being, happily, beyond the rail, a fact that had probably saved the sail above it) and hove the thing well-overboard —just as Fred, the other seaman and the boy came bounding on deck, and began to tear off the pieces of burning tarpaulin and throw them into the sea. Barely had the case sunk to its own depth when, with another loud explosion it leapt some feet out of the water and toward the *Barwood's* rail, as if it would jump back aboard. It fell clear, however, still flaming, and seeming to have set the sea on fire.

"Starboard! Starboard your helm!" shouted Roger, thunder-struck at the strange action of the box. His purpose was to haul the schooner's stern away from the infernal thing. She obeyed her rudder quickly, and, to all appearances, only just in time; for again the case gave a loud report, sprang upward, and dropped back slightly astern, burning as if the ocean could not put it out.

"Steady!" cried Fred. "Don't jibe her!"

The man eased his wheel, letting the vessel swing back to her course. All the pieces of flaming tarpaulin had gone after the box. Fred and Roger stared at each other in stupefaction.

"Did you see it?" asked the latter.

"What, Jump! Didn't I. The dam'd, unholy thing!"

"What on earth can it be!"

"Hell-fire, for certain! There's nothing else in this world that the North Sea won't put out at a touch!"

"But what—"

"I know! That dandy chap said water mustn't touch the cases! The rain's got through the tarpauling, and—"

"Quick, up with that new tarpaulin! Smart there, Warton! After him, boy! Lend them a hand, Fred!"

Off went the three to a forward locker, while Roger worked feverishly at the lashings of the other coverings, in order to separate and spread them out so as to keep the rain from the other cases. In the midst of this he chanced to look up and ahead on the lee-side, and saw, not a quarter of a mile away, a brig on the opposite tack.

"Up helm! Up helm! Quick, for God's sake!" he cried, dropping the lashings and running aft. With a swing of his arm he flung off the mainsheet and let it run, then began to haul away furiously on the lee-spokes of the wheel.

The *Barwood's* head swung off. The brig came up

away on the weather-bow, dangerously close, and Roger breathed freely again, as some one aboard the other vessel shouted down the wind a derisive question as to whether or not all hands were asleep on board the schooner. Creeping up in the thick weather, the brig's master or mate had held-on, evidently on the score that he had the right to do so according to the rule of the road. Roger could not blame his steersman, because the mainsail prevented the latter from seeing properly in the direction from which the brig had come. At this juncture Fred, the A.B. and the boy appeared forward with the tarpaulin. Roger called them aft to haul in the mainsheet, explaining the while what had happened; then he sent the boy to keep a look-out under the lee-bow, and he and the other two set rapidly about recovering the dangerous cases; but first they were wiped with towels, etc., under the shelter of the tarpaulins, lest the rain should find its way between the joints of the wood and reach the "salt." Then Roger and Fred went aft to discuss the situation, every one being still on the alert for another explosion. Of course, they agreed, fraud had been practiced on them as to the "parcel." But what was it? And were they to keep it aboard, now they knew of its danger?

"Wait a minute," said Roger, and dived into the cabin.

Fred went to the pile again, sniffing, and looking for possible openings through which the rain might trickle. He was on tenter-hooks to know, to see what

the "salt" was. Roger reappeared with a small book in his hand; this was really a list of the dangerous things that a vessel might carry, with instructions as to how and where to stow each one and what to do under emergencies. Roger had glanced at likely pages, when Fred joined him; so, together, under the lee of the cabin and with their oil-skin coats opened to keep the book dry, they began at the first page. Presently they came to "metallic sodium."

"That's it!" ejaculated Fred, with conviction. "Look, every word proves it!" He pointed to the description, etc. "And that devil of a Frenchy, or whatever he is, said it was salt! See where he gets the excuse for 'salt'?" While Roger read on, Fred added, giving an emphasis to every word: "I'd like to salt him with it, just."

"I don't know," said Roger. "It may be that. Let's look further on."

"All right, you look. You know more about books and scientific things than I do; but I'll put my money on the metallic sodium."

Roger turned the pages till he came to thorium, used in the manufacture of acetylene mantles, etc., and was of the opinion that this material might be in the cases. Fred could not answer; but he said:

"Look here, will you give me leave to open a case?"

Roger looked doubtful. "That might be breaking cargo," he replied.

"I don't care if it's breaking the gates of heaven—

hell, more like in this case. But, anyhow, I'll take it on, if you give me leave. We ought to know what the stuff is. We've a right to know!"

"Where would you open it?"

"In the cabin, where there's neither wet nor fire."

"All right, go ahead."

Speedily the tarpaulins were loosened on the lee-side, away from the drizzling rain. The box at the top corner was eased out. Fred covered it with his oil-skin and carried it away. Roger remained to see the others recovered properly. The top of the case was screwed on; this, thought Fred, was good—it would obviate knocking. With the box held firmly between his feet he drew the screws, and was removing the top when Roger entered. What they saw were four packages in a sort of tinfoil, and sealed up in a way. With every precaution that there was no moisture about, not even faint perspiration on his hands, Fred raised one package to the cabin table. There, while he and Roger were on the alert for anything so far as the mysterious substance was concerned, he opened the top, and together they gazed silently at the contents.

"Where's that book?" asked Fred.

Roger produced it, and they compared the substance with the description, etc. Fred was for getting a can of water and droping a pinch of the material into it; but Roger said:

"No, not in here. Better not try any experiments, in fact."

"Look out, then." He fastened up the package again, rolled it up in a piece of old clothing snatched from his bunk, and made for the deck.

"What are you going to do?" asked Roger, following him rather apprehensively.

"Show you this *is* the salt of hell—the salt that Old Nick's fishermen use to salt down the bad herrings of this earth; and that heaven-dam'd Frenchy's one of 'em."

Fred was now on deck. He turned aft, between the starboard-rail and the side of the cabin, halted on the lee-side of the wheel-gear and flung the package, still in its extra covering, away astern. A few moments passed. Roger was about to expostulate at this proceeding with cargo—he having the conscientious sailor's objection to so heinous a crime as "broaching cargo" under any circumstances—when there was a muffled report astern, and up came branches of flame and water which were hard to distinguish from each other. Again for a little while it appeared as if the sea was on fire.

"Now, what do you say to that?" Fred inquired, turning to Roger, who made no answer. "You can say what you like, but I'm not going to sail any longer with his packed-up water-on-fire." He moved forward again. "The two separate are enough for this poor sailor any day; but to have 'em rolled up together—well, *I'm* no salamander-swimmer," and he disappeared around the fore starboard corner of the cabin, again followed by Roger, now with his face

showing that constitutional uncertainty of mind which had so often made his father reproach him with the word "slacker."

Within a couple of minutes Fred was out again, carrying the screwed-up case, which he immediately sent after the single package, from a position near the taffrail, as before. Once more they waited and listened; then came one and quickly afterward two—three explosions, followed instantly by the same appalling phenomenon of flaming water. In watching the proceedings the helmsman had gone so far off his course that Fred sharply reprimanded him, and showed him how he was carelessly drawing too close to a neighboring vessel; then, again by the cabin-door, he said to Roger, in a low tone that would not reach the ears of the men:

"Well, what is it to be, old man? . . . I don't want to pull off in the only boat there is, and I'm not one to funk it any more than you are; but wisdom's wisdom, and the fool never gets there."

"You mean to jetson the lot?"

"I do, that much and no less. I'm no angel, and I haven't the properties of Shadrack & Co., and p'raps that's why I refuse to sail any further with liquid fire in a solid state . . . I'm not superstitious, or I should think something else about this. As for the men and the boy—well, it's a marvel to me they're still aboard. You've been had, so you're justified in pitching every ounce over the side. . . . Just think of it, supposing bad weather broke out, and a sea came

aboard and got among those cases! Splutter, where would we be?"

He remembered his stowing some of the cases on deck, at the outset, and twisted his mouth grimly at the thought of what might have happened. Roger was thinking that for his own sake merely he would not have cared greatly if a sea had found its way into the cases. But, as the matter stood, he finally agreed that the one prudent and justifiable course of action was to heave the cases overboard. So to the work he and Fred went at once. They worked from the lee side, with the unemployed A.B. to hold the tarpaulin in place, after each box was taken out. They would not allow him to carry a case, lest he should stumble and smash it on the wet decks. They also used coats to prevent the drizzling rain from getting on to the boxes as these were carried aft, to be thrown over the stern. Thus for about an hour the steady, grim procession continued, with fairly regular detonations away in the schooner's wake, with short pillars of fiery water succeeding to each set of explosions and each one leaping up as the other died down. It was a weird sight, and neighboring craft must have thought it very strange; while Roger and Fred were mostly concerned to maintain their footing on each journey aft, and thankful that the breeze held on and gave the *Barwood* speed enough to keep her well away from the explosions. When the last case was reached Fred asked if they should not keep it, "to be used in evidence against 'em," he said. Roger thought it would

perhaps be safer to let the whole thing go; it might be better not to take any further risk, than to have an accident and get damaged, or maybe lose the vessel—if not worse. But Fred could do as he liked. So the latter procured two dry sacks, wrapped the case in them, with canvas and tarpaulin outside, and stowed it away safely under hatches; then had his tea, relieved Roger of the watch, and was glad to see the schooner go heading away for the mouth of the Thames, he thinking alternately of their escape and of Betty joining him in Rochester. Meanwhile, Roger tried to get some sleep, ready for what he expected to be a long night's work and anxiety.

## CHAPTER XXIX

LATE one evening (when the schooner was about half-way on her passage to Harlingen) Shelford strolled easily into Rugwood House, found Aaron reading, and dropped into a chair. Closing the book (the Bible it was, for Aaron had lately taken afresh to it and Milton), he placed it on the table at his elbow, looked up and said casually :

"Well, Dick, what's brought you over so late?"

"Heard the news?" queried the other, in a similar manner.

"News? What news?"

"You haven't been over by The Dragon to-day, then?"

"No; I've been down by the marshes all day." This was in the opposite direction.

"You'll jump, then."

"Why, what is it?" Aaron enquired, in a manner that seemed to say there was not much on Foulness that would make him jump at the moment.

"Bob Churchend's wife has gone off with Chris Nazewick."

"Well, I'm not much surprised, after what went on when he was here. Are you?"

"Yes; I must own I am. I didn't count much on

that, though some seem to have. Young men an' women—an' we're none of us very old yet—they don't gen'rally heed a bit of flirting." And Dick stretched out his shapely legs, crossed his feet, and looked nonchalantly across at Aaron.

"Ah, Dick, you were always a bit of a light-love yourself.—Wasn't you? But you've got one that understands you, fortunately, and doesn't seem to mind it much. All the same, you'd better be careful, or you may come a cropper one of these days." Aaron could not resist the opportunity to "improve the occasion." Dick only laughed, however. "Have you seen Bob?" was the concluding question.

"Yes."

"How does he take it?"

"Oh, just as you'd imagine—anyhow, he appears to. Of course, he's never been one to make any show about what he feels; but I'll bet he's hit hard. 'Tain't your straight-face that always feels most because he or she shows it."

"Is he going after 'em?"

"Not that I know of. He doesn't say so," Dick answered, and began leisurely to fill his pipe.

"I thought he wouldn't; but he would if he felt it enough."

"I don't know so much about that. Bob's one of them that thinks when a woman's gone in that way it's best to let her go; because she'll only go agen, or want to; an' things are never the same agen after it."

He lit his pipe, as Barbara came into the room,

put Aaron's first question to Dick, and was shocked into half disbelief at his short reply.

"But is it true?" she persisted, after a short silence on her part, during which she had stood where she first heard the news, and they had passed further remarks on the absorbing topic.

"Yes, worse luck," Dick replied, "true as letters can say, that is."

Barbara asked a few more pertinent questions as to how he knew, etc., then added: "When was it?"

"About a week ago, I think. You know, she was up there when Roger went away; an' she came home for a day or two just after, then went off agen early last week, in her father's trap, while Bob was at Rochford market. Well, when she went she took all she had—seems she came just to get her things."

"When did he know, then," Barbara put in, still thinking that the scandal might prove to be hearsay.

"Oh, he guessed right away—so he told me this afternoon. 'Course, he'd had his suspicions an' that. He went up to her friends by Maldon, then to Chris's shop, and made sure of it right enough."

"That was some days ago," Aaron observed.

"Yes."

"He's kept it close."

"Yes. I told you he's hit harder than you think."

"Then who has let it out?" asked Barbara.

"Oh, father Churchend, of course. He couldn't

keep his own mother's shame a secret. Could he?—If she had one."

"And where have they gone? Has Bob found out?" she wanted to know.

"To London, he says——"

"Where all bad things go," interpolated Aaron. There was another pause, which he ended with: "Well, I pity her; because she'll be the one to suffer in the long run—that's sure; it always is."

"Blest if I'm so sure about that, either," said Dick. "Elsie isn't one to put on sackcloth, when she can leave it in the drawer an' wear fine things; and, then, there are no kiddies for her to worry about." Dick pulled up sharply, remembering the general supposition that the same condition was a source of grief in the Rugwood household. Then he added quickly: "She could always take pretty good care of herself—if you recollect." The last words were directed at Barbara, who replied, somewhat hesitatingly:

"No, she was never very sentimental, I own."

"Sentimental! They've always been a rather smart lot in a way, the Newlands, 's far as I've heard."

"And rather immoral, somewhere or other," Aaron rejoined. "But it always comes home, sooner or later."

Barbara interposed with a repeated expression of amazement and regret; for to her Elsie had been "the pick of her bunch"—a little too practical withal, perhaps; but her one-time playmate, and a friend up to a week ago. This she followed by an immediate good-

night to Dick and went upstairs, leaving the two men still discussing the subject.

Since Roger sailed there had been no change in the mutual bearing between husband and wife. If there was one alteration in herself it was that her Sunday-school work had now dropped into complete abeyance; this, into which irregularity had first been allowed to creep when she discovered that her love was truly not her husband's, was now ended; and, as the out-setting laxity had helped to stir Aaron's restless questioning, serving him as some evidence of what he had intermittently suspected, he now looked on its cessation as further proof that Roger had not left home solely because of the quarrel between them. Instead of being drawn by her own trouble into such acts of service as might have given her a kind of side-outlet for her pent-up grief, she had shrunk still further into herself.

And on a temperament so responsive, despite its masterliness, as Aaron's was—where his affections, pride of place, etc., were concerned—this was bound to have a corresponding effect. The result was that his quietude of manner had deepened along with Barbara's; but while she contrived to be absorbed from waking to sleeping by her domestic duties and the journeys and calls which these occasioned (for it must be remembered that there were no shops on the island), his evenings and an hour or two in the afternoons, except at the busiest times were spent in or near the house and with little or nothing to do. At this period he was well-supplied with workers, and

was, therefore, more in evidence about the farmstead than had often been the case in the past. And, whereas in her womanhood Barbara had never gone to and fro with loud joke or laugh on her lips, and not very frequently with a snatch of song there; his were marked the more by their absence. If any one in the house noticed this more than Barbara and Aaron did, that one was Margaret; but the latter was a woman who knew when silence made for peace, and was not given to talking generally.

Of his fluctuating suspicions Aaron had not said a word, even in the faintest of hints, since Roger went away. As we know, it was not in him to open such a subject with her, so long as it could be left alone; his nature was against an action of that sort, almost to the extent of looking on it with dread. For he knew that, owing both to his own temperament and to Barbara's, if once the matter was put into words, made the subject of moving discussion between them—and between them it could not be less—things would never be the same again, at least not for years. With a meeker or a lighter-hearted woman it would be different; but Barbara was herself, and, while she would bow to the truth and go whipped in thought at her shame, she was one who would deeply resent, and long afterward feel the sting of, any attempt to saddle her with so heinous a wifely sin, if the sin was not hers. And this was where Aaron stood—on the revolving pivot of doubt, dread to move where moving would be over ground that could not be retraced,

fear to lose what he had in trying to find what he thought he had lost, and the recurring self-admonition to be quiet in the hope that his suspicions were all wrong, and that matters would right themselves presently, now that Roger was away.

Thus, as brooding was in the family—in the environment, repeatedly for days together in the spirit of things generally on and about the island—Aaron now had his periods of almost silent thought; when he came and went as he had not done since the death of his first wife, and sat hours together in the evening with his Bible or in reading Milton's heavy, swinging lines. The worst of this feature was a growing habit to talk aloud to himself at times, as he went alone over the land, now ending in such a remark as "you're a fool—an imaginative fool, Aaron Rugwood! Shake it off and be a man!" then, remembering Roger's use of the word "ordained," in "Lord God, what a sinner I've been to deserve this at such a time of my life!" And he generally returned home in the same frame of mind in which the mood ended. The fault on Barbara's side being that, instead of playing to his moods, as she had done in the early part of the year, she steadily pursued her own rather self-centered course of conduct, thinking—in common with Aaron—now that Roger was away all would go well again. But it must be borne in mind that this error was not a kind of perverse complaint against the circumstances that bound her in so tragically; it was constitutional—due, in fact, to her perhaps rather nar-

row yet certainly strong dislike to pretending to be what she was not. In other words, Roger's going away had unexpectedly thrown her so much upon herself that the true self had thrust policy and necessity into the background.

Following a silence in their talk of Elsie's running away and its local concomitants, Aaron asked, referring to the crops mainly: "How are things showing with you?"

"Bad," replied Dick, more dejectedly than was habitual with him even in misfortune, and thinking that the question was general.

"Oh! how's that? They didn't look so bad to me when I was over there a week or so ago."

"I mean altogether. The truth is, I didn't come here to talk about Bob's trouble, really. I'm full of it myself."

"Why, what's up now?" Aaron queried in surprise.

"Well, you know things haven't gone well with me for some time. The debt father left was a bit heavy, an' I did a bit of speculating to pull things straight. That went wrong; so I mortgaged part of the farm, an' I haven't been able to pay the interest. Now they're threatening to foreclose."

"Who are they?" asked Aaron, heedless of the disclosure—some of which did not surprise him, and true to his usual habit of going straight to the essential point where business was concerned.

"The mortgagee?"

"Yes."

"Oh, a London man that lives in Southend; but a firm of solicitors there did the transaction."

"And how much is it?"

"The principal's £700, at seven and a half per cent."

"Have they said they'll foreclose, really?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Within seven days of yesterday, if the interest isn't paid before then."

"Why didn't you come to me at first?"

"Oh, well, I didn't want to trade on family connections," Dick replied, rather embarrassed and shamefacedly. "I knew if I did you'd want to stand in for me. And 'Bel didn't like it, either."

"That's just why you should have come. It's a family matter—an' I believe in families holding together, specially in trouble."

"It's dam'd good of you to say it!" Dick remarked earnestly and regardless of Aaron's known dislike to swear words. But the expression was allowed to pass, for the compliment was pleasing to Aaron, who said at once:

"Let's see, we can take the sands at ten o'clock in the morning an' be at these solicitors' offices before twelve. You have all your papers ready. I'll call for you, and we'll settle their account for them before dinner." Not surprised at this readiness to help him and glad that the matter had been so easy, Dick began clumsily to express his thanks; for, full of words as

he was on ordinary occasions, an affair of this sort made him feel quite sheepish. "Oh, never mind that," Aaron interrupted at the mention of gratitude and repayment. "You slip off home and tell Amabel it's all right. She's too good to be left with the miserable thoughts of a broken-up home."

With that he stood up; Dick did the same, and they went together to the front-door. From that point Aaron watched his "nephew"—as he had grown to speak of Dick—away under the July stars, to hurry home with the good news. Then he made his usual round of fastening-up and went to bed, pleased with himself at what had transpired, and glad that "one of his family was not to come down on the island." In addition, so closely did his vein of religion run with his strong traits of poor humanity, he was truly and distinctly thankful to Providence that he had the power to provide help in such a case. All the same, however, the dominant feeling was the pleasure of the giver; for—and this was in common with Roger—he did love to give, to be the benefactor, his only condition being that the recipient should be grateful to the extent of acknowledging him as a kind of *deus ex machina* in the crisis. Granted this, then giving was more than success to him; on the other hand, Roger, while finding less intense joy in the act, barely cared whether or not he received thanks. Not that Aaron intended to give the £700 and interest to Dick; his purpose was to pay off the mortgagee, and let his

loan stand merely as a first debt on the farm, at no interest, and to be paid back as Dick could afford from season to season. Which, as Aaron found on the following day, was more than Dick had expected.

## CHAPTER XXX

THE *Barwood* was scarcely moored to the quay-side in Rochester, on Sunday-morning, when a landsman, with a certain cast of features, stepped aboard. Without hesitation he went up to Roger, who stood by the cabin-door, and inquired, in a soft sort of ingratiating voice that seemed to be barely suitable to English:

"Are you the captain, may I ask?"

Roger, with that suspicion which the shipmaster always feels toward well-dressed landsmen who approach him with this very question during the hour of arrival in port, and with an instinctive dislike to this person in particular, answered off-handedly: "Yes. Why?"

"I think you have a small consignment of chemical salt for Messrs. Leoni," and he tendered a business card.

"Yes. At least I——" Roger was about to say "had"; but he checked the word, took the card and queried: "Are you one of the firm?"

"Yes. May I see the consignment?"

"A principal?" Roger persisted, looking at the card.

"Yes. My brother and I are the firm," and the

words were accompanied by a smile that fitted the voice.

"Because I see you name is Levi here, not Leoni."

"That is so. Leoni is our trade name."

"M'm." For the moment Roger was undecided how to proceed. He saw at once that to say what had happened might cause the whole firm to abscond, for he doubted if there was much of a business behind them. Clearly he must retard the matter somehow. He raised his head, from an apparent study of the card, saw Fred coming aft, said to the Levite: "Wait a minute," and went forward to meet Fred, who was more ready than himself at subterfuge. A few remarks in exchange were enough. They recognized that to talk long apart might arouse suspicion, so they walked aft together, Roger asking: "What is it you want about this parcel?"

"I thought I would like to see it—that is all."

"But this is Sunday, you know—our Sunday, anyway."

Fred was closely eyeing the landsman, and thereby strengthening his already unfavorable opinion.

"Yes. But—er—. I thought the consignment was on deck."

"It was; but we had to put it below," Fred interposed quietly.

"Oh," said the man, a little surprised, and taking "below" in its usual shipboard sense of in the hold.

"And I'm afraid you can't see it a while—not today, anyway," added Roger.

The man plainly showed his disappointment, whereon Roger further explained why he could not open his hatches till certain formalities had been completed on the following day. Still the stranger appeared to be unsatisfied, and seemed as if he would ask more questions; but Roger turned away, leaving the other to go reluctantly ashore. Then master and mate went into their cabin to discuss the situation. Fred was for at once hunting out a solicitor and getting advice. Roger did not know whether to do so, or to wait until the next day, then let matters take their course from the Jew's initiative. He did not see how they were to get damages, except for the tarpaulin, and perhaps payment for the labor done. Fred argued that there must be some means of making "this chap with the map of Israel on his face, or the other Jewey-looking Frenchman, stump up for the fraud and the danger of it all." There would be no good gained by going to Roger's agent, even if he could find the latter's private address, because he had shipped the metallic sodium on his own account. In the end, although unpersuaded, Roger strolled into the town to find a lawyer and to post a letter from Fred to Betty, asking her over on the Monday; while Fred remained aboard, according to custom. Roger had no expectation of success, first or last; but, owing to a question put to a police-sergeant, he found what he sought in a solicitor who had a professional plate on the gate of his private house. What was more to the point, the lawyer's opinion was that he could easily get the freight-

age from Messrs. Leoni, whose name and reputation he knew. So Roger returned aboard, with news that delighted Fred and caused him to chaff Roger, who did not mind the joking.

Soon after breakfast next morning Mr. Levi was there—sitting on a bollard alongside, smoking a cigarette, as Roger went ashore on his way to the custom-house and to the lawyer again. He passed the Jew, giving him a short nod, in return for a suave “Good morning, Captain,” being now sure of his ground, Roger considered that there was no need to practice dissimulation, also that politeness would be wasted on such a person. At the first sight of him Fred turned his face the other way, in order to laugh freely. When Roger returned an hour later, the man arose, approached him, and asked :

“Are you cleared in all right now, Captain?”

“I am,” answered Roger, and made for the schooner’s rail.

“Can I have my parcel, then, and my bill of lading?”

Roger turned, faced the man, and said: “Your parcel’s at the bottom of the sea, if not all burnt away in the water; and your bill of lading is at the office of Mr. Stewart, solicitor, in Mitre Street, where you can see it, if you go there.”

“Vaat!” cried the man, so far taken off his guard as to fall back on what was most likely his recently original pronunciation of the English word.

“I’ve told you, your metallic sodium had to be

thrown overboard for the safety of the vessel; and you will have to settle with Mr. Stewart about the damage done by your fraudulent 'salt.' "

With that Roger climbed aboard, leaving the Jew gaping at him, and meeting Fred as he touched the deck.

"How goes it?" half-whispered Fred, as they turned along the deck together.

"Oh, it's all right; it appears we can make them sit up for it."

"And a jolly good job, too!" And Fred suddenly refaced the quay, as the infuriated Mr. Levi rushed to the edge of it, uttering abuse. "Go home, you 'salt' monger! I wish I could salt you down in your 'salt!'" Fred interrupted.

As Roger was saying "Come away, and let him rave," a boy ran up to the Jew and gave him a letter, which he tore open, read, and hurried out of sight.

Directly that was the end of Roger's dealings with Messrs. "Leoni." During the afternoon the lawyer sent a man for one of the packages in the case of "salt"; the others might have to be taken back to Harlingen, and a law-suit instituted there, as that was the place where the nominal shipper lived.

In the evening Betty arrived, having missed the steamer at Southend and travelled around by Tilbury and Gravesend. Fred secured her a comfortable room in a neighboring restaurant, and spent much of the evening in hearing a recital of Elsie Churchend's elopement with Chris Nazewick, and in telling of their

voyage; one result being that on the following day Betty sent home long letters in which the fire experience was half-innocently exaggerated almost beyond recognition. One of these went to Barbara, who read and trembled, but said nothing to Aaron, under the impression that whatever there was to tell him Roger would make the communication. As to the misfortune of their old playmate, Bob, both Fred and Roger were genuinely sorry; but they were not much surprised, because Elsie had always been a little too "smart" for the homeliness of the island, and was well-known to have had a constant hankering after the more exciting and less permanent flesh-pots of the mainland.

Before the next cargo, one of cement, was in, Messrs. "Leoni" had compromised by paying the freightage, the solicitor's fees and the cost of the tarpaulin.

"What shall I do with the other three packages of this stuff?" Roger asked, on receiving the money from Mr. Stewart.

"I think the best thing you can do is to take them to sea and throw them overboard," was the answer; and Roger went away with that intention.

But, like many an unusual thing in the stress of routine, the sodium was forgotten till the schooner was well out of the Thames—after being watched out of sight down the Medway by Betty, who at once followed in the steamer to Southend. The *Barwood* was, in fact, standing up to a light south-south-east

wind, in Barrow Deep, with an ebb-tide running to its close, when Roger remembered the dangerous packages. The decks had been cleared, washed down, and were still wet, when he fetched the case on deck, at the beginning of dusk, in the first watch, Fred and his seaman and the boy being asleep below. Roger put the thing down on the fore-hatch, undecided whether or not to heave it over the side as it was, or to take off the sacks, etc., before doing so. He elected to save the coverings, and to throw the stuff over packet by packet. Having stripped the case and removed the lid, he took the first package and made aft along the lee-side of the deck, saying to the helmsman, after a chance look around:

"Keep her full-and-bye, or you'll have us on the Barrow here." And he took another glance ahead and astern, to leeward withal.

Barely had the man answered, when, in that momentary examination of the *Barwood's* position, Roger slipped on the wet deck—he had not paused while gazing fore-and-aft—and fell sideways, with his feet against the spare spar that was lashed along the scuppers. In falling the package was instinctively flung from him. It struck the deck and burst. Almost before a part of the two stone of sodium had touched the wet planks Roger saw the situation and made, sprawlily, as if to wipe the whole spill over the rail. That spasmodic effort ended in a frantic grabbing at the broken packet and sending it scatter-

ing overboard, while he was yet on his knees and scorched in the act. But the scattered portions and what escaped when the wrapper burst had all touched water and sprung into flame. The helmsman left his wheel and ran, shouting, to Roger, as the latter leapt to his feet, thinking that disaster was now upon them, and casting wildly about for a means to extinguish the flames.

"Quick, the sacks!" he cried, and rushed forward, snatched up the sacks, gave one to the man as they both turned about and ran back to where the fire was spreading in a dozen places on a line with the main-hatch. The smaller outbursts were smothered in a few moments, meanwhile they yelled to those who were below; then they grappled with the flames that leapt bluishly from where the sodium had been thickest. In this there was the speedy help of Fred and the other A.B., who tore off a hatch and shovelled cement on to the fire.

When the flames were nearly out, Roger, with his hands blistered and face smarting with the heat; sprang suddenly to the weatherside, remembering the schooner's position at the moment of his fall. Too late! There was the Barrow sand not a cable-length away to leeward. All the same he shouted Fred and the men to this and that sheet or tack, jammed the helm hard-up, and ran to help here, there, everywhere, to make the *Barwood* fill her sails and gather way. But she would not—or could not in the small space allowed

her for that purpose. Left to herself when the man hurried to Roger, she had come up in the wind, fallen off again, lost her way, got into the sweep of the tide, and now struck on the sand—happily not with very much force, owing to the smooth water and the light breeze.

However, she was there, "fast as a church," and neither bewailings nor cursings would mend the matter. The sails were immediately taken off her, to ease the strain, as she lay with her bilge on the edge of the sand. Then their several burns were washed, oiled, and tied up in rags. Afterward the damage made by the fire was examined and proved to be some charred places in the bulwarks and decks, the worst being a hole about a foot long in the latter. This was at once repaired by nailing over it tarred canvas and boards; at the tail-end of which work Fred took the remaining packages of sodium on to the starboard bow and there with an appropriate and forceful remark on each one hove them away on to the tide, as it ran past and carried their explosions and ensuing flames safely away from the vessel. Meanwhile two small craft passed, going inward, and took the schooner's name and position—after offering help that was not needed—for the usual purpose of reporting them up the river, in case the wind should freshen and help be wanted. Then a kedge-anchor was rowed out to windward; and when the flood-tide lifted the *Barwood*, in the small hours of the morning, her crew

hauled her off the sand, and once more proceeded on their voyage; but not without some misgivings that the heavy cement and the bump on the sand had possibly strained her timbers.

## CHAPTER XXXI

IMMEDIATELY on her return home Betty was able, without knowing it, to lessen Barbara's anxiety about the schooner and those on board, by describing, under close questions, what she had seen of the explosion and fire out of which she had made such epistolary capital. But when Barbara heard that a box of the mysterious stuff had been taken to sea again, she hardly knew whether to look more lightly or more seriously on the matter. Since Roger went away she had taken to a daily and careful perusal of the shipping news; and, as a result, seeing the number of what appeared to her to be utterly unimportant happenings recorded there, she could not understand why such an occurrence as fire, caused by a weird sort of "salt," that water could not put out, was not reported in full. As to Aaron and the fire, hearing of it in this round-about way, and getting no direct news from Roger, made him say "there must have been far more smoke than flame," and trouble himself no further on the subject.

But Barbara knew that, under the present circumstances, Roger was not likely to write to his father on such a matter. Thus, in doubt, she, on the following day, read of the schooner having been aground and

got off again, "damage unknown." This further disturbed her mind, but there was no surface appearance of the turmoil within, the risk was far too great to allow of that. Nor did she tell Betty of what she had read—first, because it seemed to her to be more charitable to withhold what might not be bad tidings till matters proved them right or wrong, and, second, because there was every reason for her to keep secret this newly acquired habit of scanning the shipping intelligence in the two London newspapers which Aaron received daily.

But in hugging all this to herself and striving to keep every gleam of it from all eyes, she was doing unconsciously what the poor bird does when it flutters about a nest which it fears to have discovered. Had she been able so far to overcome her shame at this love for Roger, as to have made a confidante of Betty—who in her simple way was true as steel, and sympathetic as a piece of soft wax to any genuine love-affair or sorrow—then, by the means of that outlet for the too pent-up things within, she would most likely have escaped the increased trouble that came upon her.

The truth was that this strain of anxiety had led to more walking in her sleep. She had acquired the habit of unloosening the secret string from her ankle, as though she were awake, and wandering about the house until she either awoke or returned to bed, to find in the morning that the string was undone; for the subtleties of a brain wandering during sleep would

not rise, in her case, to the double deception of securing it again. At first she thought that the fault could be corrected by changing her habit of falling asleep with the string and the unconscious rising on her mind. But this method did not always work as desired. Then she began to dread that, in spite of Aaron being both one who slept heavily and seldom awoke till morning, he would awake some night, find her gone, search for her, and come at once to the conclusion that her mind was sorely troubled about something. And, seeing the matter from her own personal standpoint, what could that something be but worry concerning Roger? What else was there in her life for her to trouble about to such a disturbing depth? And, as she was aware, he knew quite well that this habit of hers occurred only during times of mental stress.

And so it happened, coming first by the way of an accident. In returning to the bedroom Barbara tripped over an up-turned end of a rug, and went heavily to the floor. The thud aroused Aaron, who jumped immediately from the bed, divining what had occurred; for burglars were quite unknown on Foulness. By the time Barbara was on her feet, dazed with the shock and the sudden awakening, he had struck a light, and was asking if she had hurt herself. With a rather uncertain reply that such was not the case, she crept into bed again. He blew the candle out and returned there also, thinking deeply of the occurrence. Barbara rather expected that he would

say something about the matter on the following day; but, contrary to his old custom he did not. She was not much surprised by his silence, because of the change that had come over him during the past few months; and she knew by it that he was thinking all the more of her return to sleep-walking, and the harassed state of her mind increased in consequence.

Scarcely a week afterward, while Aaron was undergoing a spell of toothache, Barbara was up again, unconscious that he—lying awake with pain at the time—followed her downstairs, he with a lighted candle, and watched her go to an enlargement of Roger's photograph that hung in the parlor and stand there a while in the warm night, muttering—nothing intelligible, yet seeming to talk to the likeness—then go up to bed again.

As before, Aaron kept his own counsel; but the happening set him back on a train of thought wherein he first saw that ever since he began to look on Barbara as a future wife something or other, that he counted as vital to his happiness, had gone wrong. The commencement of this was Roger's going to sea; then, as a mental rebound to the subject of his son being the cause of trouble, there were those landmarks on the way: His quarrel with Wallasea; the set against him made by his neighbors; Barbara's failure to present him with a child; Roger's remaining a bachelor, instead of marrying, making a home at Monkton Barn and increasing the Rugwoods on the island; the fiasco of his bringing Amabel to the

house; his trouble with Nazewick and the fresh dislike of others; the injury done by the Pride of the Marshes to Roger; finally the suspicions which came in a way out of that injury and out of Roger's declaring before then that he would never marry.

It was here, when he thought of the bull and remembered how insistently Barbara had advised him to sell it, that he was pulled up by the query: What was her motive in this?—when she knew how he treasured the animal. Like damnable evidence it came on the heels of her sleep-walk to Roger's photograph. It was his first inkling that she was possibly in love with Roger, and, figuratively, he stood agape at the bare idea. There was no reflection that he had been blind; that he should have thought of such a thing happening, seeing how the two had grown up together. He had come through all those years, as every one else seemed to have done, with the settled conviction that they were too much brother and sister to each other, that they were too unlike in ways, and that Roger was too indifferent to the feminine element generally, for them ever to be lovers who would look to a union as the natural conclusion of their affection. Now, mentally, Aaron gasped at what there might be before him—gasped at the awful loss of her; for, given such a love, she could not, in his mind, be other than lost to him. And what other meaning could he wring out of her neglect of him, when Roger was lying in bed; her pressing, in a sense, for the sale of the bull; the otherwise barely account-

able change in herself, and now this sleep-walking to Roger's likeness? And so on till he stood aghast at that other feature of this possibility of his wife being in love with his son—the scandal that must ensue from its becoming known. Horrible!—as much horrible as anything could be to him. For from that day forward life on Foulness would be for him intolerable completely. He, "the great man"; the up-to-date, enlightened, successful man; the upholder of Church and State; who believed that "What God had made He would excuse"—to have to bow his head to this and remain on the scene of it all was unbearable even in thought.

During several days he went about like a great, strong man stunned in some strange way. For the first time in his life his sleep was affected by worrying thought. Barbara noted it all and was disturbed accordingly, even while she strove once more to be as she had been, without making any impression on him. Again she walked in her sleep; the string had become useless and was discarded in a kind of despair. He knew of the former fact and took to locking the bedroom-door. A few nights later he heard the bolt of the lock shoot back, leaped out of bed, took a candle and fetched her back. When the door was locked again, he, worked up to that pitch where his self-control vanished, turned and asked, in suppressed passion:

"Barbara, what's on your mind?"

To answer him truly meant ruin to all that he held

dearest. Surely, if ever in her life, this was a time for subterfuge, for prevarication even.

"I'm worried because of you. I know you're in some trouble," was her half-truthful reply, as she went toward the bed.

"Your mind's with Roger on the seas," he said in a voice that she hardly recognized. She was pushing the bed-clothes back, knowing that here a lie must be told or the truth admitted. . . . "You are guilty, Barbara! In the name of God, you are guilty!" he added in a hoarse sort of whisper, and meaning that she was in love with Roger, for to him that was *guilt* of a preventable nature.

Standing upright again and turning quietly about till they stood face-to-face, his being strangely moved in the flickering light of the candle in his hand, she replied, with steady compelling emphasis, and taking his "guilty" as an accusation of real dishonor:

"In the name of God, Aaron, I am not guilty."

Seeing it as he did, as an answer to his charge, it was too much for him—something that he could not tackle. He fell back within himself, feeling that all things prizeable were crumbling about him in this the greatest mistake of his life. For had he not previously recognized that if once this matter was opened it would mean that henceforth he and she must perforce tread a new and a painful road together.

He turned across to his side of the room, with the sensation that the door of his happiness, of all those dear things that had made life enjoyable to him, had

just been closed for ever. In a paroxysm of passion he had accused her of the worst of wifely crimes; she had denied it in a sacred oath, and feeling that she would never forgive him, he could never again look her in the face.

She got into bed, drew the light, summer clothing over her, and wept in silence unknown to him. He blew out the light and went to his place at her side—to lie awake, then to sleep badly; and afterward to go about like a man whose nature had been changed. While Barbara, for obvious reasons, left dangerous subjects untouched.

## CHAPTER XXXII

ON the first evening after their arrival in Harlingen Fred set himself the task of finding the shippers of the sodium, with the determination of "giving 'em a hot ten minutes," partially in general satisfaction of the whole affair and in part because of the second outbreak of fire, and a slight leak that had come, apparently, of the schooner's bump on Barrow sand. This was by arrangement with Roger, who could not be away from the vessel at the same time, and was scarcely in the mood for such an encounter. But Fred's hunt proved to be fruitless, as did two subsequent ones. No trace could be found of the shippers. So Roger discharged his cement, got his next cargo in, and sailed for Tilbury. Scarcely was he clear of the Dutch coast, when a long spell of light southerly and westerly winds set in, accompanied by fogs and spring tides; the result to the schooner being that at the end of a week she was up off the coast of Suffolk, with Fred chafing impotently under the delay, and Roger taking it all as a part of the day's work.

Then, following about two-and-twenty hours of dead calm, in which there was some heavy August sultriness—although the time was early in September—up sprang a south-easterly wind that soon fresh-

ened into a strong breeze; and away went the *Barnwood*, as close-hauled as she would stand, for the Thames again. But this breeze quickly put a lop on the sea, and the schooner's laboring showed presently that what had been a slight leak in fine weather was a different thing when straining to the wind. Half-an-hour at the pump at the end of each day had been enough since they made the Dutch coast on this voyage; but, from certain indications about six hours after the breeze began, Roger sounded the well and found, to his temporary dismay, that the leak had increased considerably.

This was in the forenoon watch. Roger went to the wheel, and sent his A.B. to rig and man the pump. Presently he changed places with the man, partially for the purpose of sounding the well again, before he said anything about the leak. The water in the hold was still as high. Immediately he sent the boy to call the other seaman; then went to Fred, aroused him and remarked:

"We're in for something nasty!"

"Why, what is?—Going to blow?" the other asked, rubbing his eyes and sitting up on the edge of his bunk.

"No," Roger replied, "not too much for us yet awhile. But the leak's got bad."

"The devil it has! Really?"

"Yes."

"What's she making?"

"I don't know. I haven't measured. But War-

ton's been at the pump half-an-hour without reducing it."

"Lor'!" and down leaped Fred to the floor, to pull his clothes on in all haste.

"But that doesn't say that two hands at the pump won't reduce it. I let him go easy, because I didn't want to say anything till I knew how the matter stood."

"M'm, leaking just as fast as a man can pump.—Black!"

"Oh, I don't know yet. Come up, when you're ready. I'll go to the wheel, and put 'em both on to the pump."

Roger returned to the deck, leaving Fred dressing in hurried silence. Presently the latter stood by the wheel, and together they discussed the pros and cons of the situation; till Roger again ascertained what water there was in the well. This time it had gone down, but far from enough to be satisfactory under the circumstances. Another consultation took place aft. Fred was for at once running into Harwich, which was not more than ten miles away their lee-fore rigging, and the wind was fair into Harwich harbor. But Roger thought that, as one man could keep level with the in-flow, it would be better to go right on—the ship-master's pride was touched; he could not run for shelter while there was a chance of reaching his port of destination without a halt. If the wind held, he said, they would be in the East Swin by noon; then they could bear away a little, put on

more canvas—which had been shortened at the morning change of watches—"and fetch up to Tilbury in no time."

Admitting that this was all right if the circumstances continued, but rather curiously dubious of it happening, Fred agreed, then went to the men, told them the situation, and at once proceeded to stir them into greater pumping activity by putting on the wheel a hand that was like a grip at the end of a small piston-rod. At eight bells the water had been so far decreased as to enable one watch to go to dinner, while the other steered the schooner and worked the pump.

When all hands were on deck, after the meal, Fred suggested that they should try her on the other tack, and watch how the leak fared then. As she had bumped her port bilge on the Barrow, he had a notion that a seam or a butt-end had opened somewhere there; and if she were put on the starboard tack, thus taking the strain off the port side, they would be able somewhat to locate the leak and possibly act accordingly, if the necessity came upon them. By this time they were drawing in toward the Walton shoulder of the Essex coast; therefore a board out to sea would be rather beneficial than otherwise, as it would enable them to clear the Gunfleet sand and fetch into the East Swin on their next board to the southward. So around she came and stood away from the land. The pump was fully-manned again, and drew dry before the hour was out. Fred carried the news joyfully

to Roger, at the wheel, pleased that his idea had proved to be apparently correct.

Soon afterward Roger took his bearings, and back came the *Barbara* on to the port tack. Having handed the helm over to Fred, and set the two seamen to relieve each other at the pump, he brought his sounding-rod and line into action once more and narrowly watched the rise of the water in the hold. Steadily it crept up, and steadily the wind freshened, till, when the *Barwood* was well into the Swin, he took a hand at the pump along with the men, in order to get the water down again; otherwise it was plain that time would have to be lost in making another board outward for that purpose. For a while he and the two A.B.s took turn-and-turn about, so that all the time there were two on the pump. Then Roger tried the rod again, and found that the water was gaining on them. Very evidently the leak had increased, was probably increasing all the time. He went aft and told the black news to Fred, adding sadly, as he looked shoreward:

"I'm sorry I didn't take your advice and run into Harwich."

"Anyhow, it's no use thinking of that now. We couldn't get back there," was the vigorous answer.

"No; and at the rate the water's coming in we can't get up the Thames even high enough to beach her at Shoeburyness."

"But we can get into the Crouch maybe." Roger went up the little ladder to the roof of the cabin, to

take bearings as well as he could in the gathering darkness. "There's the Gunfleet away to lu'ard here. The Crouch must be somewhere under the lee-bow; so we could bear away and put more canvas on and be in there in an hour. It's three-quarter-flood now."

Roger descended and said: "Yes—that's the only thing to do; otherwise she'll go down under us. I can feel she's already getting heavy with the water in her." He took hold of the wheel, adding: "You take Beckles and the boy and set the topsail and flying jib. Leave Warton at the pump." Fred was hurrying forward, between the cabin and the bulwarks. "Fred."

"Hullo!"

"Sound the well again, and do the same as soon as you've set the sails."

"All right!"

And away went Fred to the work, knowing that it was now a race between them and the rising water, and incidentally wishing that he had Messrs. "Leoni" aboard. Meanwhile Roger steered, and looked around to ascertain if there were any craft near enough to be of assistance, if the worst came upon them. All that he could see were a barge working for the Crouch and some four miles ahead, a brig entering the Middle Deep away to windward, and a couple of collier-steamers astern and to windward withal. Then came thoughts of that other side of what was happening—his running home, in a sense, for safety; running from death to the island where all his hope of happiness had died, and where he had known times when

he would have been glad of death—would have sought it by his own hand, had he been so constituted.

With many a shout which the breeze made faint aft by carrying it away to leeward, the two sails were spread out, giving the *Barwood* increased speed; while the clink-clank, clink-clank of the pump could be heard amidships. Then Fred sent Beckles to join Warton on the pump, sounded the well again, and went aft.

"She's gained nearly a foot," he said grimly.

"A foot?—in about twenty minutes!"

"Aye. She must be opening all along the side here." He stood near the weather-rail. Roger gazed away to leeward, where the white-capped seas were running hard for Buxey Sand. As if understanding his thought, Fred concluded: "No good, old man—there's no way out down there."

"No; we're in for it now—one way or the other. Get the boat cleared out, smart as you can. Have everything ready for a moment's notice. Then bring a hand aft and set this main-topsail."

"Shall we set the sail first? It'll be a big help and make her steer better." He saw that Roger was having some trouble to keep the schooner fairly straight, with all that head-canvas on.

"No. We may want the boat first. Hurry up, Fred—and put the boy on the look-out and tell him to stand-by for any call. Tell them all just how things are; but keep calm."

There was small need of the injunction, however,

for even his energetic mate was doing everything without bustle. Every mind, down to the boy's, was aware that the situation might end in "jump" at almost any minute; therefore they were keeping every faculty on the alert for the supreme probability.

When the work was done, and Fred was aft again he said, as a grim sort of joke: "It's no use, Roger, my boy—the sea doesn't like you. It never did like them that don't like it."

"I think you're about right, Fred," was the quiet answer. "At anyrate, it looks as if I'm not to have any more of it yet awhile—unless I get too much before she strikes (an under-thought was that he would not care if he did)—for evidently this is the *Barwood's* last passage." He broke off shortly, in sudden yet slight superstitious dread that this might prove to be analogous to something more terrible. "*Barwood's* last passage" seemed to get hold of his mind.

"Oh, I think she'll fetch up there somewhere," Fred rejoined breezily. "Another half-hour should do it, at this rate; and I don't think she'll go down in that time."

"Try the well again."

Fred did so and returned with the information that there was another foot of water in the hold. "She'll about fill up in an hour."

"It looks like it. Is everything ready that you can think of?"

"Yes; everything."

"Take a look under the lee here."

Fred crossed the deck and gazed ahead and to leeward. "All's clear. . . . Where are you going to pitch her?"

"Where I can. Suppose you go for'ard and let me know the moment you see land to lu'ard. Here's Foulness Point to wind'ard, I believe."

"All right. Better stick her on the weather-side if you can."

Roger was silently peering through the darkness away the weather bow. Fred went. For some little time the only sounds heard were the sough of the wind, the occasional slatting of the luff of a sail, the clink-clank of the pump, the creak of running-gear and the breaking of seas near by, as the schooner rushed heavily on to her doom; and Roger knew by her movements that, in spite of the free wind, the heavy press of sail—every yard of which was needed to get her along—and the strong breeze, she could not run many minutes longer. Besides, he also knew that the tide had already turned and was against them. He was blaming himself for not heaving her to, launching the boat and deserting her before this, when Fred shouted:

"Here's Holliwell Point close aboard!"

"Lay aft, then, all hands!" cried Roger in return, and a clatter of feet along the deck was the reply. "Boy, get a hold on something on the weather-side here! You look after yourselves, men. I'll ease her up a bit, Fred, then let her go head on—else she may break up at once."

"All right!" shouted Fred, from near the fore-end of the cabin.

Down went the helm, and up swung the schooner. But the intention was too late. Caught by the inflowing tide, she struck nearly broad-side on, and over went the two masts at the impact, carrying bulwarks and fittings with them and heeling her over to starboard. For a moment the crash of breaking woodwork drowned all other noises. In that instant the boy was flung past Roger—as the wheel kicked him violently away from it—and over the side to leeward. In the next breath Roger was over after him, grappling about in the black waters and the lessening turmoil of things generally. He caught him, sinking under the edge of the mainsail, as it lay on the water, still secured to its mast and boom, the latter being yet fastened aboard by the long sheet. It was on the sheet that Roger got a grip at once with his free hand, helped the boy to the same, and so back on board, both of them bruised and gasping for breath. Scarcely was he again on the heavily listed deck when he shouted:

"Are you all here?"

The two seamen replied. They were close at hand, between the cabin and the port bulwarks, where they had stood at the moment of striking. Warton said his wrist was broken; he had been thrown against the side of the cabin.

"Where's the mate?" asked Roger, in great anxiety.

"Don't know," said Beckles, and began to add some details.

"Then look for him!" interrupted Roger, who pushed past the two men and commenced a hurried search of the deck generally; but Fred was not to be found. In eager haste, hoping with all the heart he had, he and Beckles procured lights and searched again—the decks, the wreckage alongside, the cabin and the fo'c'sle, the doors of which had been open all the time. Fred was not there. Beckles thought he had heard a shout just after the mast went overboard, but he was not sure. At this Roger, the man and the boy feverishly got the small boat through a big gap in the lee bulwarks; and Roger and Beckles made a more careful examination of the wreckage, especially of the part that lay floating furthest from the vessel, they shouting all the time and pulling the boat eagerly from point to point. But Fred was not found. Unknown to them, clinging to a chance piece of the wreck, hearing faintly their cries borne down the wind, and fearing that he would lose consciousness, because of a knock he had received on his head when he was flung into the sea, Fred was then drifting away with the ebb-tide over the Rag Sands, too far away to make them hear his voice against that strong breeze, even if he had still been in full possession of his usual strength.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

THE first thing that Roger did, after the lamentable discovery of Fred's disappearance, was to foment, oil and strap-up Warton's wrist, which was not broken. Then he asked the other man and the boy if they had any injuries. They answered negatively. He told the boy to put on dry clothes, and all three of them to prepare to go ashore. While they obeyed his orders, he, however, made a further survey of the schooner and her position; the result being that he decided to drop an anchor, remain on board, and so prevent her from being claimed as a wreck.

Filled with the gall of despair, Roger now exercised some of his father's tenacity of purpose—as he had done in smaller ways and on lesser occasions in the past. The water had been some inches over the cabin floor, which showed that, given no change for the worse in weather or position, it would not rise much higher with the next flood tide, because the vessel had gone ashore within an hour of high-water. When his three hands were ready for shore he explained the position to them, told them that if they wished it he would row them to the beach and leave them to find lodgings wherever they could, or sleep in the cabin with him till morning. If they went ashore

they would probably have to walk three miles to the nearest house. There was no prospect of worse weather before morning. Here they had food, beds, some comfort, a measure of safety; and with the boat alongside and the land just there, what could harm them between then and daylight? They elected to stay. So Roger bade them get some supper at once. Meanwhile he, feeling sick at the thought of food, prepared the port anchor and did some necessary work to the wreckage. After the meal, the anchor was dropped; such things as were urgent received attention; then Warton, Beckles and the boy stretched themselves on the cabin seats—after Warton had offered to take the first watch—and fell immediately asleep.

All the night through Roger paced to and fro—as well as the slope of the decks would allow—kept an eye on the changing matters around him, and wished again and again that he had either put into Harwich, or launched the boat and left the *Barwood* to sink in deep water; or, better still, that he had gone in the place of Fred. Out of that over-powering, secret, sentimental desire to put the schooner ashore, as he could not run her to safety—and mainly because of the name she bore—he had sacrificed his friend, brought death and desolation where there should have been long and happy life. He thought of poor Betty; also of Wallasea and of the dark, little man's strangely impressive manner on that hot day when he stood on the deck there, threatening to

curse. Curse or not, the purport of it had come diabolically true, he thought. It was in part for this reason, and partially because he was still in the grip of black despair, that, as soon as he had made a further search for Fred round about generally, and was otherwise free, on the following grey, overcast morning he rowed across the mouth of the river, made his way straight to Wallasea's house, found him in the yard, giving directions about some cattle, and said:

"Are you satisfied, Mr. Wallasea? Your curse has come true."

"Aye, what?" cried the other, turning a sudden strained, thin face to Roger, and fixing his black eyes on him, as though he was an apparition that had just risen at his feet.

"I say your curse has come true, and come home to you as you deserve."

"What d'ye mean?" was the next question, in the tone and manner of which there was some anger—the anger of an ill-tempered man who was being interrupted needlessly, and who showed it by hitting the ground with his ash stick.

"I mean that my vessel is wrecked, and Fred is drowned!"

"Whaat!" The elongated word was almost shrieked out.

"You've heard it. And while I'd give my life to bring him back, for his and Betty's sakes, I don't pity you a scrap," and Roger moved away.

At three paces distant the little man leaped at him,

with the ash sapling. But, intuitively knowing what was coming, Roger turned in time to seize the stick, that was meant, in savage madness, for the back of his head. With but little effort he wrenched it out of the elder man's hands and sent it whirling away over the cattle sheds on the further side of the yard. Then he walked on again, not saying a word to Wallasea's disjointed splutterings of impotent venom and half-crazy grief. But the latter grasped a too-handy manure fork, and was charging Roger with it when his own man tripped him up and took the fork away, saying that he was not going to see murder done in *that* yard, even if he lost his work there and then for interfering—which, apparently, was to happen.

Roger left Wallasea alternately cursing him, bemoaning the loss of Fred, and discharging the man. With a thousand times sadder task before him he made straight for the Churchend cottage, near The Dragon and the big, frowning, black mill. Himself full of the blackness and the horror of it all, he was resolute in his intention to carry the whole "ghastly business" through without delay; otherwise he would have gone home and induced Barbara to transact this part for him. To Betty his story was much longer, much more roundabout, and told with all the sorrow and compassion that his sympathetic nature could bring to bear as a softening factor in the heart-breaking news. Leaving her in the first rush of her grief—and her father to go out and spread the news, as Roger knew he would—the young man walked

quickly towards home, his own share of the disaster now rising in pain and shame before him, and in ten-fold the poignancy with which he had felt their coming when he knew the wreck to be inevitable. But as he neared the house he heard Wallasea's high-pitched voice on the other side of the thick hedge, that had hidden him from Barbara's eyes when he first went aboard the schooner on his fitting-out project. Soon after Roger left him, the little man had cut along the other side of the unequal triangle, on the points of which stood his farm, Churchend's cottage and Ruggwood House. This was not to seek and force an encounter on Roger, but to find and heap accusation and curses on the latter's father who happened to be indoors, preparing to drive to Wakering. As Roger opened the gate on to the front, high-enclosed garden, Wallasea was crying to Aaron, who stood on the edge of the verandah, apparently mystified by what was going on:

"I told you it would be! I told you the Devil was a-sittin' on your hearth! You thought you was the great man!—didn't you?—with your young wife, an' no God's blessin' on your union! You was mighty an' could prevail! Oh, you was everything! But Foulness has found you an' got hold on you an' down you comes. It ses—Level 'em, level 'em, level 'em; An' you're levelled, same as that," he pointed to the neatly trimmed grass on which he stood. "You an' your fine, gentleman son what ha'e drowned my boy, an' will go cursed to his grave! For I ha'e cursed him, as I

curses you!" Roger was on a line with his elbow, passing along the lawn toward the front door. "Yes, you, you murdered, 'tis you ha'e drowned him! You ha'e robbed me!—you an' your goin' to sea! Where is he?" he leaped into Roger's path, not two feet away, with the wiriness of a steel spring, and still half-shrieking as if his vocal apparatus was a mechanical falsetto. "What ha'e you done with him?"

"He's drowned, Mr. Wallasea, as I told you—by the hand of the Almighty——"

"By the hand o' the Devil, that's you!" and in a frenzy he sprang at Roger's face, his hands outstretched and fingers bent, like the talons of an enraged eagle—which, in fact, the little man strangely resembled in face and manner at that moment.

Roger, almost twice his size and weight, swept him aside with one arm, which Wallasea seized and clung to, snarling and biting. Roger brought the other hand into use for the purpose of freeing his arm. Aaron came off the verandah, saying:

"He's mad!—mad as can be. What's the meaning of it?"

"No; not so much mad as crazy with grief. He's to be pitied; but this won't do. Let go, Mr. Wallasea, and control yourself!"

"Why, what's happened?" his father queried, as Roger calmly endeavored to free himself from the little man's frantic and disordered attack.

"The schooner's wrecked on Holliwell Point yonder, and Fred's drowned."

"My God!"

"Mr. Wallasea!" Roger jerked his arm away, and Wallasea fell to the grass, stiffening and foaming at the mouth.

"He's dying!" cried Aaron, dropping on his knees, and raising the small dark head on his arm. "Run into the house and get some brandy!"

Roger started on the errand, and was met on the edge of the verandah by Barbara; who, from the other side of a curtain at the parlor-window, had watched and heard the whole affair. Naturally there was no greeting between them, under the circumstances, only an exchange of looks and a hurried passing. By the means of Barbara's knowledge in "First Aid," with the help of what Roger had learned aboardship, Wallasea was temporarily attended to, then taken home, unconscious, by Aaron and Roger in the trap, who immediately afterward drove to Dr. Potton's surgery and left word for him to go to the Wallasea farm as soon as he arrived, about noon.

On the way home Roger told his father the story of the wreck. For some minutes Aaron was silent, then he said tentatively:

"And now you're going to——"

"Live in Monkton Barn, for the present anyway. There's nothing else to do," Roger answered, with enough of his present fit of decision to show Aaron that he meant what he said.

"Then you'll come back, farming?"

"Yes. You want me to, and I should like to please you—if it can be done properly."

"Yes."

"And if it doesn't work out all right, I must make a new move for myself. I've done with the sea."

"Fred's death has upset you?"

"It has."

Another silence followed. Aaron was thinking of this sudden change in things, of Roger's going away, this return, and what would be the end of it; also of the alteration in his son, this newly-acquired "manliness." Was it permanent? Or would it pass away, as the grief at his loss of Fred became less? As to the fundamental cause, the starting point of it all—for the time being his thought was that he must have been in the wrong all the time. Otherwise how could Barbara and Roger have spoken and acted as they had on certain occasions? And how could the latter have come back in this manner and calmly announced his intention of living in Monkton Barn and resuming the farm-work.

At the same time Roger was examining his father. From the first he had become aware, vaguely, subconsciously, that something was missing in him; that he was so unlike the man who had talked with him at the gate by the old quay, on the evening before the schooner sailed that he appeared like a starched thing damped. After leaving Wallasea at home, when talk became more general between them, this idea had

recurred. Now Roger was looking back over all they had said, and coming to the conclusion that the change in his father was real, not a thing of his own fancy. What had done it? Thus the son cogitated—as his father drove homewards—stumbling mentally about the cause, for the mere reason that he could not imagine it to be due to anything else.

Just before they reached the house, Aaron remarked: "Then you'll have to tell Barbara to get your room ready."

"No, I shan't," Roger replied, with the same, quiet decision.

"Why?"

"Because I'll neither sleep nor eat in the house, as I said—not yet, anyway."

"But you don't mean to say you're going to keep *that* up?" exclaimed his father, in open amazement wherein there was a little of the old-time energy of disgust.

"I'm going to do as I said I should. You're going to Shoebury now; so while you're there you can easily run up to Southend and order what little furniture I shall want at the Barn——"

"I don't think I shall do anything of the sort!" was the rather snapped interruption, this opposition being one of Aaron's ways of saying that he was sorry for his share of the past, and wanted Roger to resume the old relations and pay no heed to what had happened. But the son answered, significantly:

"You'd better—if you want me to stay here. . . . The things can be here to-morrow or the next day, and I shall be occupied with the schooner till then; so there'll be nothing strange in it."

Unconvinced and unwilling, Aaron agreed; and Barbara—who knew the prime reason of Roger's decision in this matter, but not the cause of his determination, for which she now so highly commended him in her heart—said nothing except that he could have the contents of his room sent up there at once.

"There's no need to," he said. This was immediately after he had, in Aaron's presence, once more told the story of the wreck, and so had the loss of Fred brought back poignantly to his mind. "To-morrow will do, just as well. I'm going back aboard now, and I don't expect I shall be on this side again for a couple of days; because whether she breaks up now or not, I'm going to stay by the schooner till I've finished with what there is left of her."

He went out by the front-door mainly because it stood open, and passed over the verandah, saying his final remarks as he crossed to the gate; and Aaron and Barbara stood by the doorway, answering, then returned inside—he to drive away at once to "take the sands"; while she went back to her household duties, full of obvious thoughts, among which, however, there was an idea that Roger might have been a little less brusque toward her. True to the feminine nature and to her own temperament, forgetting that he

was in deep grief, and unaware that this sorrow had lent him some habitual strength, she saw only that his bearing was much the same as it had been when he brought the schooner to lay her up on the Roach.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

IN consequence of the lessening of each flood-tide—prior to the rise at the equinox—the *Barwood* retained her position about fifty yards from Holliwell Point; and, as the weather somewhat fined away during the evening after Roger's three calls on Foulness, he found no discomfort in staying aboard. His hands remained with him, saying they would not leave till he left, or she broke up. Thus, by arrangement with his insurance office, he salvaged the sails, spars, etc. Then, on the afternoon of the following day, while the hulk lay high and dry, and a couple of ship-carpenters were caulking that gaping seam under the port bilge, a man walked out from the Point till mud stopped his progress, and he shouted:

"Hi, there!"

"Hello! What is it?" answered Roger, from the starboard bow, where he and Beckles were working.

"Have you lost a man?"

"Yes! Have you—aye, what?"

Out of what the man was shouting at the same time Roger picked up: "In my cottage—"long here!" he pointed along the coast by the Ray Sands. "You come an' ——"

Roger heard no more. He was sliding down a rope

to the mud, through which he splashed, ankle-deep, up to the man, and asked, "Where?"

"Long here."

And away they went, hurrying northward, Roger making the pace; meanwhile he learnt that the man, while going the round of his wild-foul decoy that morning, had come across a stranger, lying senseless on the ground, and with the appearance of having been in the water recently. He had got the young fellow away to his cottage, gone to a neighboring farm to get some one to fetch a doctor from Southminster, and there learnt of the wreck. Yes, the doctor had been, and said the case was a bit serious because of exhaustion and a nasty crack on the head. Roger did not think of asking what the stranger was like; with the hope as farther to the belief he took it that this must be Fred.

Thus, talking they covered about a mile of the fore-shore, then turned inland over the marsh, arrived at the cottage; and Roger could have jumped for joy when he saw Fred's pale face on the rough, dirty pillow. To his questions, however, he received only rambling, nonsensical answers. Fred was delirious. Within ten minutes Roger was away again, swinging his long legs for Southminster. There he had a short interview with the doctor, and at once posted by train and boat express to Foulness. His first idea was to have gone straight to Betty; but Fred's home lay almost right in his course; so there he went, found Wallacea sitting in an arm-chair with every evidence of

the stroke upon him. Full of pity at the great change in the little man, Roger said quietly, as he walked across the floor:

"Cheer up, Mr. Wallasea—Fred's alive."

"Aye?" came the startled query, as some of the old light leaped into his dark eyes.

Roger explained briefly, yet sufficiently, said he would fetch him (Wallasea) to Fred in a few days' time, when he would be more fit for the journey, then hurried away on the other part of his errand. It was dusk when he unceremoniously opened the door of old Churchend's cottage and strode in, calling:

"Betty, Betty! Where is she?" the question being directed at her father, who sat smoking by the fire-side.

"I can't say. She was here just now. Why?"

"Betty, Betty!" he called.

"What's the matter? What——"

"Betty!" Roger was going toward the kitchen. She appeared in the doorway, her usual quietude now full of sadness and most of her high color gone. Before she could speak, he added: "Come on, girl!—come on! I've got Fred! He's all right—at least he's going to be. He's rather ill at present with exposure and that."

Betty sat on a chair and looked at him. He hurried out further explanations, etc., interrupted by Churchend's sometimes answered queries. Then, when she fully understood his story and project, she hastily prepared, and together they started on the return jour-

ney. In Southminster, where a trap was hired to take them to the cottage, Roger bought all the extras that he could think of as likely to be necessary.

On the following day he went back to the schooner, settled with the men, and relinquished the work to the insurance company. That evening Fred regained consciousness and told how he had drifted along the coast, on a piece of wreckage to which he had managed to secure himself by a line attached to it, too weak to get the thing inshore and expecting to be carried across the mouth of Blackwater river, and so to his death. But the timber had grounded on a spur of sand, thus allowing him to stagger away to the marshes, where he had fallen insensible soon after daybreak, then regained partial consciousness, wandered about, and fallen again. He thought he must have lain through a part of the day and all the night where the decoy-man had found him.

After a week of good nursing and bright company—for with the recovery of Fred all Roger's gloom, and much of the moral strength that had characterized it, had gone like a night-fog before a strong morning breeze—they all went home, noticing, as they crossed the Crouch to Foulness, that the *Barwood* had been taken away. (The insurers after stopping the leak, pumping the water out of her and lightening her cargo, had caused her to be towed up to Burnham and prepared for sale.)

Roger went at once to Monkton Barn to live, and had Margaret to keep house for him—with her parrot

to hang in the kitchen and screech "stockings," or "sugar," or "go to pot," according to impulse. This would have been gossip enough for the time being, especially as there was already a low murmur as to why he had gone to sea again; but Fanny Nazewick just then returned from a spell on the mainland, and brought a husband with her—"a pale-faced towny with a cough," some of the scandal-lovers said. This did not affect Fanny, however, nor her freckles or love of bright blues and reds. Gayer and much more kind-hearted than she had been before the "stocking elopement," it was soon seen that she had reason to be satisfied with "her bargain"; for, despite his lack of brawn and color, he was very fond of her. Then, when he bought out Bob Churchend suddenly a few weeks after his arrival on the island, and installed himself and Betty, with a managing-foreman, in the place; and Bob—hard hit, as Dick had said, for all his surface-indifference—left for New Zealand, there was more talk set about at a swoop than the gossips could carry around conveniently.

By this time Roger had settled down again to life on the land. He had also gone back, in nearly every detail, to his former habits and self generally—perhaps in part because, at his father's repeated desire and to keep tongues quiet, he had taken to spending some of his evenings and most of each Sunday at Rugwood House. It would be difficult to say what he might have grown to be as a man, had Fred been drowned, and he had gone through the remainder of

his life with the idea that his friend's death was due to his lack of promptness and proper judgment. As it was he soon became the same rather easy-going, easy-forgiving and usually generous-minded one that he had always been—with the old love-hunger now and then so much to the front that Barbara checked it all she could, and dreaded Aaron breaking out of the gloom that had marked him, with certain lights and shades, since that night when the word "guilty" was mentioned in the bedroom. Truth to tell matters between the three of them were much as they had been just before Aaron told Roger to keep away from the house in working hours, or go to sea; except that the father still seemed to be like a piece of buckram with most of its stiffness gone. And try as Barbara would she could not lessen this new quietude of his. Whatever she tried to that end, he took it casually, sometimes brightening up a little, but generally remaining as one whose interest was half-dead.

The fact was that Roger's bearing towards Barbara—which, in simple truth, had become more open because of his father's quietude—had now convinced Aaron that the origin of it was not a brother's but a lover's affection. He remembered that "what God ordained," and was debating secretly whether or not to tell him to leave the island, and, if so, thus cause an irreconcilable quarrel, set scandal going about them, and, worst of all, possibly cause Barbara to show him the coldness of a wife who detested the

jealousy of her husband. With the old stamina in him and the unassailed belief that Barbara was still all his own, he would have rapped out at once. Now with that stamina gone, mainly because she had so contradicted his accusation of "guilt" and made him feel that he had bemeaned himself irrecoverably, and in part because he now actually feared to offend Barbara, he went about, hugging his trouble to himself. The man, who had been so strong in the hour of success, great prospects, and the possibility of fulfilled desires, had realized by the loss of certain highly-prized portions of his unity of peace and pride, that destiny lay not within his making; and that now, when faced by a greater test of his strength, he was palpably weak. It was in this frame of mind that he chanced one day to meet Wallasea on the road, the latter being about again daily, but with the stamp of that stroke still on him generally, and, to all appearances, never again to be the man he had been. The meeting was sudden; it occurred as Aaron turned from fastening the gate of a field in which he had been supervising some autumn work. Their glances met, and almost before Aaron knew what he was doing his hand went out abruptly, and he said slowly, in a voice full of feeling:

"Ben, can't we be friends again?"

The little man turned his dark face up towards Aaron's open one, saw deeper into the lines which he had watched appearing there, and replied, as their hands met:

"Ay, Aaron. I've been in trouble; now you are."

"Trouble, Ben? I'm a broken man."

"Nay, nay, not yet. We're only what the time makes us, every one of us—as you an' me ha'e said in a way many a time. An' when it's past, we'll be what the next time makes us." And Wallasea faced about, walking along with Aaron, as the latter replied, despairingly:

"Not me, Ben—not me. The time won't change again for me,—that fact's in my blood."

"Then I know what's wrong. . . . She was too young for you, Aaron."

"My God!"

"You shouldn't ha'e done it. It works all right now an' then, but seldom—very seldom."

Thus talking they walked along slowly together; but Aaron gave no further particulars of his trouble—it was too deep, too tender, and as yet (on her side of it) too uncertain for pointed reference; also, Aaron in trouble was too much one of his secretive race to open his mind fully, especially in the first hour of reconciliation with one who had been at bitter variance with him for five and a half years. Before they parted—as the sun went down, red and angry among jagged clouds over the mainland, leaving a grey, wind-swept autumn sky, that told of wild weather being at hand—others had passed them, gaped at seeing these two together, then gone away to talk of the wonder they had seen. By the following evening all Foulness knew that Aaron Rugwood

and Ben Wallasea were friends again. It was by this gossip that Barbara and Roger knew of the meeting, and congratulated Aaron on it, for they were genuinely pleased; yet he said little to them on the subject.

This was small easement, however, to that which pressed so heavily on his mind, and grew heavier within a week of the break being healed-up. As a consequence of Roger's flagrant attitude, Barbara had again told him that he must either keep his love more out of sight, go away, or she would. This had brought about more moving passages between them, in which she had once more bidden him "go to his bedside and pray to God for strength, as she would have to do as long as she lived"—knowing secretly that she had ceased to do this, because there was no longer any faith in her heart that the prayer would be answered. But she did not know that Aaron had lately fastened on this very omission as a piece of evidence that if there was no guilt before, there was some of a kind now. So acute was the situation becoming, in fact, that Barbara was walking in her sleep again. And one night Aaron—whose nights of heavy sleep seemed to have gone for ever—awoke, to find she was not there. Immediately he arose, took a light, and went downstairs. She was nowhere there. Stranger still the front door was open. He stepped on to the verandah, looked around in the starry night, but saw nothing of her. Instantly he ran back to the bedroom to put on some clothing, and noticed that

hers was gone from its accustomed place on her side of the bed. Gasping at the thought that she had left him, he hurried into his clothes, and hastened almost at a trot to Monkton Barn, dreading to discover that Roger had also gone.

Immeasurably relieved on finding his son there, he said that Barbara had left the house, and he thought she might have walked that way in her sleep. Then, quickly as his father had dressed, Roger did the same, and away they went together, now in the fear that some evil had befallen her, to arouse the household at Rugwood and set everyone searching. Meanwhile Aaron was castigating himself for his wrongful thought of Barbara. As they drew near the house, Roger paused suddenly at a gate and looked across the meadow to where a path cut off a long detour to Wakering sands.

"What's that?" he cried, pointing to a greyish something on the path.

"It's her!" answered Aaron, then took the gate almost at a leap and started into a run, followed by Roger's longer, easier strides.

Before they reached the stile into the next field, Barbara had disappeared over it, and was hidden by a thick hedge. At the stile Aaron suddenly put his arm across Roger's front, saying, with some of his native masterliness:

"Stop! Go back! 'Tisn't for a man to see even his stepmother in her night-clothes!" And over the stile he went.

Roger's first impulse was to follow at once, but he checked it and remained where he was.

Aaron ran to her, took her gently in his arms, as he always did when he found her thus, and said:

"Barbara, Barbara, come, dear, you're——"

"Roger," she murmured.

His arms dropped away from her, to catch her again with a jerk as she was falling. . . . Now awake, but dazed, she walked back slowly with him; he also silent, and for the time being only half-aware that she was partially-dressed, with her nightgown over other clothing. Having gone to bed troubled with the thought of leaving the place, she had risen in her sleep, put on some clothes to go; then, apparently on a change of thought, had resumed the night-dress, and finally gone forth in that manner. She had been wandering about the place during the past hour and a half.

Again at the stile Aaron saw that Roger was going toward the gate by which they had entered the meadow. Barbara saw him, too, guessed who he was, but said nothing; neither did Aaron, whose mind was full of that muttered "Roger."

## CHAPTER XXXV

FOR some days Aaron went in and out of the house and behaved generally as a man in a dream; and Barbara, divining the cause of his abstraction yet unaware of its latest particular reason—"Roger"—and fearing to open what might prove to be an explosive mine, pitied him profoundly and did what little she could, by assumed cheerfulness in her own demeanor, to awake him from this thrall of miserable retrospection, analysis, and questioning the past, present and future. She took suitable occasion to tell Roger, and they wondered together, seeing no especial point in their conduct of late to set Aaron so much within himself—so like a slumbering volcano, except that his new, sort of strange meekness seemed to be on the increase.

Then, as he left the tea-table, about a week after the last recorded sleep-walking (in consequence of which, and of more or less nightly risings, he had taken again to locking their bedroom door and removing the key), and they came suddenly face-to-face at a corner of the table; owing to an abrupt change of movement on his part, she, stirred deeply by the pained set of his face, said:

"I wish you could be more like your old self. You make me very, very sad by the way you go about."

He gazed down at her steadily for a moment, heedless alike as to whether her statement was a kind of accusation or the mere rendering of a fact. She returned his look, feeling no embarrassment, for the plain reason that his pain and not her shame occupied her mind.

"You know that night, when I fetched you upstairs in your sleep, about two months ago, and you said you wasn't guilty?" he asked in a low, unusual tone.

"Yes."

"Can you say now you're not guilty?"

Again for lack of explanation there was the same misunderstanding as to his meaning, as she answered:

"Yes, Aaron, I can;" then added, less firmly and with sadness in her voice, "I'm guilty of nothing intentionally wrong against you,—only that my heart has changed; and I can't help it, any more than I can help day and night." She paused. He was still watching her face, with no change on his own, although she was reading out, as it were, the doom of that which was so dear to him that all things else gained their value by it, and without it would lose all their value. "I could almost wish I was guilty, so that you'd spurn me away; then p'r'aps I shouldn't feel all this terrible pity for you and myself, and you'd have something to kill your love for me."

Understanding now why she had said no to his charge of "guilty," and incidentally recollecting Roger's "What the Lord himself would forgive beforehand" and "What He ordained," Aaron turned, with-

out another word, and left the house—leaving Barbara unaware that she had clenched a tremendous nail, which could otherwise have been withdrawn, because she had thought for months past that the clenching was already done, that he knew well-enough of her and Roger being in love with each other.

Out in the dirty night, heedless of wind, mud and occasional rain, Aaron was going through the horror of it all, saying now and then, "Lord, take Thou this cup away from me! Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." (Barbara thought he had gone to talk with Wallasea, as had again become his habit.) From the general his mind went to the particular, and he muttered, "She never did love me,—that's been plain long enough now, only I—— I wouldn't believe it now without her word. But I believe she thought she did; she was always too straight to do the other. . . . She loves him; an' when a woman loves in that way, they say oceans can't wash it out—only death. All the shooing of all the world's religions can't turn it aside. . . . If I thought he was to blame, I'd shoot him like a rabbit—son of my own as he is. I brought him into the world, and by heaven I'd send him out. But no; I can't think it. I won't believe it. With all his faults, Roger was always honest—honest as the day. . . . He said the Lord ordained it. . . . I never knew him to do a back-handed action in all my life. No. . . . It's the curse of hell that's on me!—the curse of hell; and they call it the 'spirit of the island'! . . . God have mercy on me! I'm old before

my time—I'm worse,—I'm going crazed! And I thought I should be a happy man, with a happy home, and proud of it all to the end of my days." And he sobbed, as the rain pelted his face, almost unknown to him. Then came the thought: Could he go away, go to some other land and start life afresh?—go away, and leave them to work out the sequel of it in their own way. No, he could not. He was too much of the island to do that—to much a part of the soil he owned and tilled; too much of the life he had dominated, sunk back in, risen again, and was practically out of again, because of the extent to which he had shrunk into himself, and because—unknown to him—the rumor was going in nooks and corners that there was some scandal among the Rugwoods. Too faultily human at heart to be wholly a martyr, he could not bow his head so far as to surrender all things for their sakes. "And besides, after all, it would be unholy in the sight of God! *She is my wife an' he's my son!*" he cried, as if to silence someone.

Thus he beat over the ground, this way and that, now almost hating Roger, yet seeing that if he did harm to him he would lose her more completely; then telling himself that he would still *be a man*, come what might; only to find himself again at grips with the pathos and the tragedy of it all, till his heart was wrung to tears, and some refuge came once more in "What He ordained."

On the following evening, while he read the Bible again, one of the men called him out suddenly to

a sick cow. When he had gone, hastily leaving the book open on the table, Barbara had the curiosity to look at what he had been reading, and saw the following passages underlined: "I held my tongue and spake nothing. I kept silence, yea, even from good words; but it was pain and grief to me. My heart was hot within me, and while I was musing the fire kindled; and at the last I spake with my tongue. Lord let me know mine end, and the number of my days; that I may be certified how long I have to live."

So it was that on the very next day Barbara found occasion to tell Roger of this, to say plainly that she feared there was suicide in Aaron's mind, and to impress upon him that he must keep more away from the house, or something terrible might happen. Roger said he would, and did so for some days; but within another week he was there again as often as an excuse could be found.

Then Aaron, still retaining that curious meekness, and not being in an ill-mood, for which reason he disliked the thought of an actual quarrel with his son, quietly asked Barbara to discourage Roger in his frequent visits to the house. The request was no surprise to Barbara, therefore she showed no amazement, put on no dissembling. If he should again accuse her of loving his son, it was not in her to deny the truth; but he did not. On the contrary he added, in the same subdued manner that hid his deep sorrow at the failure of his domestic god:

"I don't say you're to blame, Barbara—likely

erough you're not; I hope so, and I'm trying to believe so. But however it is, he's got to stop coming here, except on business; or I shall have to take steps I don't want to," and he turned again to the London morning paper that had been brought from Wakering during the low tide that afternoon.

"Very well," Barbara replied in a tone of resignation, and went to the kitchen, grieving that Aaron was such an unhappy man, fearing that he needed but a slightly keener touch of the goad to make him "lash out."

Fortunately Roger did not call that evening. On the following morning Aaron went up to Monkton Barn and there conferred with his son on the next day's work, saying, with quiet significance at the end of the short talk:

"There, now you'll be able to see that through without comin' to me again till it's all done;" then he turned and walked off in the direction of home.

Roger watched him out of sight, understanding what was meant, and momentarily beside himself at his impotence in the situation.

Immediately after tea Aaron told Barbara that he was going to Shoebury about a threshing-machine that appeared to have gone astray on the railway; but he would be back by supper-time.

"Don't make it too late. It looks like being a nasty night on the sands," she said, in ordinary caution, remembering that he would be driving back with the incoming tide.

He knew her meaning and answered, "Oh, I sha'n't hurt—worse luck for some people. Besides, there'll be a moon." And he went out. Ten minutes later he was driving away in the dog-cart.

Soon afterwards the idea occurred to Barbara that here was an opportune chance for her to see Roger, tell him of his father's wish and persuade him that in decency and dire need it must be obeyed. She dreaded his coming there again, when Aaron might be in an irritable mood, and some alarming quarrel taking place. So, with a thought of the south-east wind that was freshening, giving a strong promise of a dirty autumn night, she put on a macintosh-coat and started for Roger's home—tears not far from her eyes, and poignant sorrow filling her heart; for now she knew, and had made up her mind, that she and Roger must be content to see very little of each other in future. It was only right, she argued with herself, conscience-smitten, and again pitying Aaron till the tears ran, as her thoughts swept over his long, long years of service to her, marked here and there by some especial kindness that would live bright in her memory as long as she had one—such as when he sucked the adder's poison from her leg in girlhood; or when he afterwards bought her Nazewick's big pony, which was still hers but seldom ridden; and when he made his will half in her favor and half in Roger's. Yes, it was only right to break from Roger; but oh, it was so hard, so unnatural! Serenely happy in a quiet,

even, if rather drab sort of way, she had asked of life no further pleasure, no higher gratification. With the hilltops of passion and glamor beyond the horizon of her ambitions, her considerations, her purview of life, she had, negatively in a sense, looked to destiny to bring no change in her circumstances.

And now, for this calamity to come upon her. She shivered, as a cold spatter of rain struck the side of her face, and a gust of wind through a gateway caught and nearly turned her about. . . . Then, to run away with Roger, as Amabel had done with Dick—how the blood thrilled through her at that thought, which was driven into her mind as the only alternative to this forced kind of final separation! What burning bliss for life! What searing sacrifice to put it away! Yes, but with the former there was a sense as of vitriol working inwardly; it suggested the case of Elsie and Chris Nazewick, rather than the other. But with the idea of sacrifice there came something that soothed the pain and immeasurable loss, that softened the heartache which years nor circumstances could wipe out. Against the consuming joy of a life with Roger and the loss of all else that was dear to her, there were Aaron's years of love and service to return, her name to be kept clean and her duty done. Another woman in her place might fling the latter aside and live richly in the former; but Barbara was not so constituted. Whatever pain or pleasure played upon her heart, however much this passion for Roger should

strive to draw her aside, she must and would remember that *she was his father's wife.*

Aaron had not covered more than half of the seven-mile drive along the sands when he met Dick Shelford, returning to the island.

"Your thresher's come!" shouted Dick as their carts passed each other.

"Oh!—Seen it?" Aaron called back.

"Yes!—Lying at Shoebury station!" was the answer.

"Thanks! I was going about it!" And around came Aaron's cob for the run home.

When he arrived at the house and missed Barbara he asked the servant, who had taken Margaret's place, where her mistress was.

"She went up t'o'rms Monkton Barn," was the answer.

Aaron gasped, in a way, under his breath; but it was hardly in him to show surprise before a servant who was not in the family's secrets.

"When? How long ago?" he inquired.

"Half-an-hour,—maybe more," said the young woman, as if almost any guess would serve the purpose.

Aaron asked no further; but, with some of the old anger at his heart, out of the house he swung and walked off along the way that Barbara had gone, heedless alike of wind, rain and gathering darkness.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

WHEN Barbara arrived at the Monkton Barn she learnt from Margaret that Roger was very busy upstairs.

"Ask him to come down, Margaret. I want to see him," said she, in a tone that made the elderly woman give her a quickened glance. "Make haste. I must be home soon," Barbara added, as she shook the rain from her coat, threw it on to the back of a chair, and passed into the sitting-room, leaving the parrot crying after her, "Put it in the pot! Ha ha-ha!"

"Well, I'm blowed! Who expected to see you here to-night?" exclaimed Roger, coming in, perspiring and unusually cheerful.

"Perhaps not, but I had to come, in a way——"

"And to-night especially," he interrupted.

"Why specially?" she inquired, half-drawn momentarily from her subject.

"Why? Because I'm up to my eyes in it, shifting my bed and things into the big, back room that was empty, so that I can look across at Rugwood first thing in the morning and last thing at night."

He dropped onto a chair, wiping his face, while happiness beamed out from action, look and tone.

Barbara gave him an instant glance, then her gaze fell at that primeval glow in his eyes. It was one of those infrequent occasions when all his dreaminess vanished as in a flash, and he appeared to be one of the most alert, intelligent, even enthusiastic men on earth.

"Roger," she began, hesitatingly, and the sadness of her altered tone threw a quick damper on his mood, "I've come to say something very serious, and I mustn't be long about it, in case your father returns——"

"Why, what is it? What's the matter now again? Where is he?" His brightness was already disappearing fast.

"He's gone to Shoebury, and I must be back before him; or—or there may be some serious trouble."

"Oh, is it as bad as that?"

"Well, you know I haven't been here since you came to live in the house; and—yes, it is; it's worse than that."

She sat on a chair a few yards away; and Roger, incidentally accusing himself for his not having asked her to sit down, said:

"Great Scott! What do you mean?"

"I mean that your father has said you're not to come to the house as you have been doing; and that means, of course, that you are to stop coming." They looked at each other silently, she with pain and significance, he in startled surprise and pain.

"He said that to *you*?"

"Yes; and you have seen enough of him to know that when he does a thing like that, he thinks it bad."

"When—when did he say it?"

"This afternoon."

Their mutual gaze at each other had now put on something of hopelessness.

"Did he say anything else? Accuse you of anything, or . . .?"

"No." For peace sake, in a way, also deterred by a kind of shame, she had not told him of what had been said about "guilty."

At this Roger suddenly threw off his despondency, left his seat, walked half-across the floor, came back and said vehemently:

"Then look here, Barbara, I'm going to stand no more of his dictatorship. I'm a man, earning my share of what's made; besides I'm living away from the house, and hardly coming to it at all. What more does he want? No, I'll see him hanged before he shall tell me just where I shall go, and how I shall look, and what I shall say and all the rest of it!"

"But you forget, Roger."

"What?"

"Me," came the sad, subduing answer; and again their interchanged looks went from mind to mind with poignancy.

"I did, Barbara. God forgive me," said he in deep sorrow.

"Besides, I want to ask you to do something more than he has."

"*You do!* What? I don't see what else . . ."

"I want you to go away, Roger." This thought had been working in her mind for days past.

"*Away?*"

"Yes, right away—anywhere—anything, if you only go from here and put us both out of temptation. If you don't, I must."

"Oh, but, Barbara, you're forgetting now! Think of what that means to me—to you even!"

"No, I'm not forgetting. I'm remembering all of us, but him most, and that I'm married—which I've forgotten too much."

"What did he want to marry you for! Old enough to be——"

"The same as you would, Roger, if you'd come home sooner and spoken," she interposed, with pained, gentle correction.

He turned half-about, savage with himself at his impotence and the situation, then wheeled back quickly, saying:

"So I should, if I'd known—been sure of myself sooner."

"But it's too late. . . . And we must bear things as they are; but we can't, if you stay here——"

"Oh, yes, we can!"

"I know we can't, and you know it, too,—something will happen, something dreadful; for you know your father will be like a madman if he breaks out. And to see him as he is now is heart-breaking."

Roger replied much as before. Margaret came in,

lit the swinging lamp over the table, and went out again, as her parrot screamed "Stockings!" Then some time was spent, Barbara in appealing to him to leave the island without delay, he in trying to soothe her fears and persuading her to let matters remain as they were. In his fervency he went close to her, and twice endeavored to take hold of her hand. In the midst of this there were sounds of heavy footsteps, and, as Roger took a pace backwards, his father was in the room, with suppressed rage in every feature of his face. Before a word could be said by either of them, he had seized Roger's clothing on one shoulder and sent him reeling half-across the floor.

"Keep your hands off me, or I won't answer for it!" cried the son, regaining his balance and coming back a couple of steps, his eyes now lit up with angry passion.

Ignoring him, firm on his feet where he stood in the moment of the fling, and looking straight at Barbara, Aaron said:

"You go home."

"I will, when you come, too," she replied steadily.

"It isn't for a wife to say she'll go when her husband does, Barbara."

"I know it; but I'm not going till you come," and she looked at him unflinchingly.

"What for?"

"Because I don't want to see violence done; and—"

"Violence! When an ingrate, thief like this——"

"I'm no thief——!"

"Comes gloomin' about to rob the hand that fed him! To rob his own father! Doesn't even respect his mother!"

"Barbara's not my mother——!"

"She is in the eyes o' the law, you damned scamp——!"

"And though she's your wife, she never ought to have been, and you know it!"

"What!"

"Marrying a young girl before she——. Keep off!"

But the warning was too late. They met like a pair of bulls. There were no blows. Aaron grabbed for a hold, to what definite purpose he hardly knew. Roger, the taller, longer of reach and barely less in strength, except in certain cases with the left arm, got the first grasp and flung his father from him. One of Aaron's feet fouled with the other, and he went backwards, his head striking a corner of the fancy iron-fender. He rolled half-over and lay still, almost as in death. Only a few seconds had passed since the onslaught was made.

Barbara rushed forward, crying, "Oh, heavens! What have you done?" She was on her knees by Aaron's head and picking it up. "He's bleeding! Here, there's a hole in his head!" And up came a hand, smeared with blood; the tip of one finger had been in the hole. Barbara shuddered violently. Roger hurried to her side, wordless, but not with such horror

as she felt. "Quick!" she added, barely without a pause, "Quick, some cloths! Margaret, bring a towel! Run, Roger, run, get a wet towel!" He was going. "Not too wet! Damp, I mean, with warm water! Quick, for heaven's sake!" And holding her handkerchief as a wad to the wound, she glanced at Aaron's face, then his breast, saw that he breathed, felt a little relieved, and cried out again for towels.

Margaret came hurrying in with one, which was immediately applied to hold the wad in place. Roger ran in with another, wet and steaming slightly. Then, all under Barbara's guidance, Aaron was lifted to the couch, the bleeding was stopped, and Roger cast about for brandy, but there was none in the house—being no drinker, he kept no liquors at hand.

"I'll run down to Rugwood for some," said he, and was moving off.

"Wait—there's something more important."

"What?"

"A doctor."

"My God, yes!" Roger gasped. "I'd forgotten. But how? The tide's coming up!" He glanced at the clock. "There's hardly an hour left!"

"Doesn't matter, some one has to go for him," Barbara rejoined, with quiet decision. Then, half-turning around, she said: "Margaret, go to the kitchen, dear, and get plenty of hot water ready, and everything you can find for bandages." Margaret went out. Barbara, looking at Roger again, con-

cluded, "If he dies without a doctor, it may be murder."

"All right, I'll be off in a few minutes." He was about to add that he had better be drowned in trying to get a doctor, than be hung for what he had done and not getting one; instead of which he moved away, saying, with some resignation that was strengthened by the anger still left in him, "But I can't bring him back till the tide goes down again."

"No, I'm thinking of it. Oh!" She put one hand to her head. "Wait a minute." He paused, looking back at her. Barbara raised her head again. "You have your light boat at the quay yet?"

"Yes. Why?"

"It is all right?"

"Yes."

"And that young horse is here?"

"The one I've been riding? Yes. I'm going on him. No time to go to Rugwood for the trap."

"No, there isn't. I'm going on him——"

"But I've no side-saddle!"

"It doesn't matter. You can manage the boat, and I can't," came the hurried words. "You row up to that ferry by Mucking Hall, it's the nearest point we can meet at. I'll take the sands on the horse, hurry Dr. Potton to the ferry in his motor, then bring him down the river and here,—that will save four hours."

"It will, by heavens! But I'll fetch the brandy

first. I've got time to give you a start." He was going again, knowing all that she meant.

"Yes. But saddle the horse first, and shorten the stirrup-straps—quick! Not a word down there,—say nothing yet. And send Margaret here, as you go out. And—and—" He turned at the doorway. "Where are your clothes, Roger?"

"On the chair by the bed—all you'll want."

And he was gone; she heard his running footsteps, as Margaret entered. Barbara rattled out her orders in low tones, took a hasty look at Aaron's pale face, noted that he appeared to be breathing all right, then sped upstairs. Within ten minutes or so of Aaron's injury being discovered she rode out into the wild night, feeling no discomfort in riding as she had so often done in the meadows, when she and Roger were boy and girl together.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

ROGER did not run the mile to his old home. The moment he had saddled the young horse for Barbara, he snatched down another bridle, jerked it on to the only other animal in the stables, hurried it out to the yard-gate, which he used as a vaulting place to the horse's bare back, and went cantering down the road. In a short time he returned with some brandy. His father was still unconscious, but had moved his head; Margaret was endeavoring to correct the harm done by the movement. A little brandy was trickled down Aaron's throat. Then Roger adjusted a fresh wad and put on bandages made from torn underclothing (some experience which he had gained aboard ship), administered more of the liquor, instructed Margaret what to do, or say to chance callers, in his absence, and was off again—this time for the quay, there to tether the horse, and begin his six-mile pull up the river, with the tide in his favor, and the wind fairly so after the initial mile was covered.

Meanwhile—solely occupying his mind for the first time since his father rolled over, suddenly pale and still on the hearth-rug, and now only because the work of rowing was merely mechanical to him—his thoughts were a hell of the possibilities that might

accrue from this affair, especially as they were likely to affect Barbara and himself. Her words, "It may be murder," persistently ran across his mind, till he saw himself on trial, passed through all the horrors of such a situation, and was only now and then superficially aware that the rain was battering at his face in quick, intermittent showers, heavy enough to go through all his clothing before he reached Mucking Hall ferry. But now and then his mind was on Barbara, knowing that she, in much worse weather, was riding that young horse against the tide, much as he had ridden him on the evening before he returned to fit out the schooner.

It was with an even more disturbed mind that Barbara galloped her horse for Fisherman's Head;\* incidentally hoping that no chance passer-by would recognize her face in the bright flashes of moonlight, and surmise at once that some scandalous calamity had happened, for Betty had told her that she and Roger were being talked about. To avoid too great a risk of this, by going past the little cluster of houses near the mill, she soon turned aside, thinking to take the sands at Eastwick Head; then came a recollection of her having heard that the head was closed. Round swung the horse—fresh from his two days in the stable—and away went Barbara again. It was too early for her to expect that all the people would be

\* These "Heads" are merely the ends of the roadways on to the hard, almost level sands, that extend from 3 to 4 miles between high and low watermarks.

indoors, some were sure to be about despite the inclemency of the night. So, with her chin down in the upturned collar of Roger's jacket, and her hair tucked under one of his caps, which was pinned securely in its place, she sat low and rode for the gauntlet. By the post-office a man and woman stood, talking, between two showers, when the clear moon shone straight up what there was of street, making the big mill stand out gaunt and black, with one sail-arm pointing straight overhead, one toward Monkton Barn, and the other in the direction of the sea and that dangerous ride for which Barbara was hurrying furiously. With a brief thought—unpleasantly impressive at the moment—of those skeleton-like sail-arms, their curious sense of urgency, and something deeper threatening vaguely in their grim aspect, also of the loiterers who would go indoors and talk of the strange rider, Barbara thundered her horse along the roadway.

Two miles more and she took the sands, in a fresh welter of wind and rain, in which there was a strong sense of salt spray, as she turned sharply to the right and heard the incoming tide ominously near on her left. Along the road she had let the horse "go his gait," he needing no encouragement, and she thinking, perhaps more than the occasion warranted, of being recognized and of kindred matters. Now, with all her thoughts fixed afresh on the possibility of Aaron dying, of Roger being tried for murder, of the great scandal and the greater sorrow of it all, and of those

subtle, rapidly-increeping waters against the rise of which she had a seven-mile ride to make, she urged the horse to the top of his speed. The loud, reverberating clatter of his iron shoes on the hard road had been distressful to her, as though she was engaged on a shameful mission. Here, in a way enjoying the quick double-thud of his feet on the firm sand, like huge hammers muffled in sacks, every now and then her hand went out and stroked his neck; she patted him, gave him words of encouragement, told him in a low tone half-enigmatically of their errand—how he would keep the family from disgrace, if he only cheated the tide; how he would probably save his old master's life, and his young one from a far more awful death; why it was not a matter for other persons to know, and he and she were doing this wild run to keep it from them; that he was a good horse, the best on the island,—a beautiful horse, and could run like a racer, and that he should have a whole skepful of corn in Wakering.

Barbara felt that she must restrain herself, or she might become hysterical, or otherwise lose her head when it would be wanted most toward the end of the ride. For what would she do if the tide came up too high to let her reach Wakering stairs ("Head")? If it drove her off the sands before she could pass Havengore Creek? In that case there would be no doctor obtained till the next day, and Aaron probably dead, and—and—and; till all the points of the matter had rushed through her brain, ending in the thought

that *she* might, if the sea prevented her from getting through, be dead before morning. Then where would poor Roger be? Standing his trial for murder, and she, the only one who could prove him innocent, dead in one of the deep creeks or washed out to sea. It was so awful, horrible that Barbara had forgotten all things except the dire necessity of getting a doctor and meeting Roger at the ferry.

Now with a hurried "clek-clek, clek-clek" and good words, and now with taps of the short riding whip that Roger had placed for her in the left stirrup-strap, she raced the horse against the tide that was already, in places, rippling with the sibilant insinuation of death-waters over the "broom-stick" marked "road." Eastwick Head, Rugwood Head, Asplins Head, had gone by rapidly, the first in rain and darkness, the second and third in a spell of moonshine, while Barbara talked to the horse as to a young servant deserving confidence, and looked anxiously from time to time at the great stretch of white-capped rising waters on her left. Now she knew that Shelford Head was not far away on her right front, for she had caught the last gleam of the disappearing moonshine on the dangerous, deep, black mud that bordered the creek on the north of New England Island. A few minutes more and the horse was splashing his way across the mouth of the creek, half frightened at the water, the noise, the sudden gust of wind and the rain that came along at the moment. The run and breaking of a little white-topped wave, scattering

its hissing foam just under his nose, made him pull up and rear and turn half-aside. Barbara, thinking more of the onward rush and the terrible responsibilities that hung on her success or failure, was not prepared for this; so that he was almost out of hand before she could reassert her authority. Once it seemed as if he would bolt straight up the waters of the creek—certain failure to her errand and possible death to him and her in the deep, treacherous black mud. Strong as Barbara was, it took all her strength to pull him round in time; then hold him still for a minute, while she soothed him a little, and off he shot again—now constantly more than fetlock-deep in the salt water, which the wind lifted and drove before it in minute drops, and Barbara tasted on her lips between the showers.

How she hoped that the moon would clear again and give her light over the worst of the ride! How she wished for a beacon at the "Stairs!"—Something burning to direct her there. How she prayed to the Almighty for guidance and success. Two-thirds of the journey were covered. She felt sure that Havengore Creek must be opening up on her right, for the horse was now knee-deep. Preparing to keep him well-in-hand when the water touched his body—if it should come so high—Barbara thought that when once past the mouth of the creek she could, if need be, make for the sea-wall, over which the horse might be able to clamber on to the marshes, where the wide ditches would keep him, till she ran the last mile to

Wakering. Then the wind loosened her cap; and, fearful of having it blown over her eyes, she snatched out the long pins and let it go. Worse still, she knew by the laboring of the horse that the water was softening the sands under his feet. Doubt, dread of failure and all the horrors that it meant, including her own death in the water and foul mud, began to get a hold on her mind. The depth of water prevented her from venturing further out, so as to be sure of keeping the horse off the mud; and she dare not go into more shallow water, because of the mud. Thus she pressed him onward, with all the encouragement possible—hoping, fearing, praying. A keener gust of wind blew her hair adrift, streaming it out, wet as it was, toward the land where all her burning desires were centered. With that gust the rain ceased. The moon came out again, and Barbara saw that she was opposite the mouth of the last creek—where the bodies of Dick's father and the latter's horse had been found dead and half-buried in the mud. Thanking God for this, and with her feet now and then in the rising tide, she talked more cheerfully to the partially-scared horse, patted his neck once more, passed the creek, and edged in toward the land until, when he was knee-deep, he began to labor again. He was on the mud. Barbara steered out obliquely to deeper water, urging, while he plunged forward in a mass of foam, almost breaking free now and then as a broadside wave nearly carried him off his feet or broke near enough to spatter them both with spray.

A little longer, and Barbara saw the well-known gap in the sea-wall. Five minutes of further struggle, the water shoaled away; he was knee-deep again—ankle-deep. Then up the slope he staggered, panting and shivering, through the gap and down—his legs shaking slightly as he took the declivity—on to the level marshland road; and Barbara said, “Now go, boy, go!” And he went, as if he understood it all, with the brilliant moonlight streaming from behind and away ahead, picking out the Government poles and scanty clumps of bushes on the marshes around.

Half-an-hour later Barbara arrived at the ferry, with Dr. Potton. Roger was waiting there. The doctor took an oar, as there was still an hour of the flood-tide to run, and Barbara steered, hugging the nearer bank of the river at each curve, in order to save ground, except when the weight of wind compelled them to slant across for the sake of speed. But the boat was light; both men were strong; Dr. Potton was as deeply interested in the matter as Roger was implicated, thus they drove the boat down-stream almost as fast as she had gone up—while Barbara sat in the stern, shivering in her wet clothes, hoping and praying that they would yet be in time.

The sloppy road to Monkton Barn was hurriedly covered, under a fairly clear sky, the wind having blown the rain-clouds away inland, and showing signs of dying away itself. Incidentally Barbara, feeling the warm blood stirred in her again by the quick pace, was inclined to take this clearance as a bright omen,

and glanced at the nearly-full moon in the hope that it would prove to be so. On the chance of Aaron having regained consciousness, and to avoid Roger and Barbara's breaking straight on to his presence, Dr. Potton advised that they go in by the back-way. So into the kitchen they entered, there to find Margaret sitting still as a log on a chair, and bent forward, with her face in her apron. She did not stir at their approach; although the parrot, aroused by their foot-steps, was crying "Stockings! Sugar!" Barbara put a soothing hand on her shoulder, saying:

"How is he, Margaret? Has he come to?"

"No, no," came tearfully from the apron, which Margaret then dropped, and added, "He never will agen—never."

"What!" cried Barbara, turning to go to the other room, after the doctor, who had gone straight there.

"Don't go! Don't go, Barbara!" And Margaret arose, showing a face that was marked strongly by weeping.

"Why?" asked Barbara and Roger together.

"Put it in the pot!" shrieked the parrot, and in obedience to Barbara's request Roger took it into the scullery. As he returned, Margaret was moaning, in answer to Barbara's further questioning:

"Because, because. Oh, it's dreadful! It's all over. He's—he's done it!"

"Done what? Whatever——!" Barbara began, then stopped, as Dr. Potton appeared in the doorway,

queries and surprise struggling against professional bearing on his face.

"What is it?" Roger asked of him.

"Not what you said it was." There was a moment's silence. Barbara and Roger were stupefied, and could only look for a meaning. "The worst has happened," the doctor concluded slowly. "Your father is dead, but not by a fall."

"Good God!" gasped Roger, seeing in a flash the meaning of "He's done it." "You don't say that he's . . . ?"

"Taken his own life, so far as I can see," was the answer.

Barbara had already turned away, with her face in her hands.

After some questioning of Margaret and a further examination of the body and the sitting-room, it became all too evident that Aaron had revived sufficiently to find Roger's wild-fowling piece in a corner of the room and shot himself. It happened, Margaret explained, about an hour ago, while she was upstairs, after a blanket, because he had said he was rather cold.

From the day of the funeral Barbara left Foulness; no one except Betty knowing where she had gone. For three months Roger bore the scandal of his father's enemies, softened by the friendships of Fred and Dick, Betty and Amabel; then the acres, the cattle, the implements, the house—including Monkton Barn

—down to the last stick and stone, in which Aaron had found so much pride, changed hands. Roger said farewell to those who had stood by him, cried quits with the debt that Dick owed to the estate, and the island was left to know the name of Rugwood only in the places that bore it and in memory. It was afterwards said, mainly by persons who would say almost anything, that Barbara and Roger were happy together in another land; but, while the rumor went uncontradicted by the four who were supposed to know, they were never heard to back it up by any affirmative except silence.

THE END



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